

(Draft)

Statement by Mr. Anouparb VONGNORKEO, Director General,
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Head of Delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (as Observer),
at the Intersessional Meeting and First Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth Review
Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production
and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mine and their Destruction
Geneva 24 May 2019

Mr. President,

I would like to begin by thanking you for giving an opportunity to speak as an observer state at this inter-sessional meeting.

From 1964-1973, Lao PDR suffered the heaviest aerial bombardment in world history, leaving us to deal with Unexploded Ordnances covering two third of the country's territory. The initial estimate of land contaminated by cluster munitions is approximately 847,000 Hectares (8,470 Square Km). The existence of these Explosive Remnants of War including Mines continues to kill and maim our people and remains one of the biggest obstacle to socio-economic development up until now. In this context, Lao PDR has attached great importance to the Convention of Cluster Munitions and Lao PDR has been pro-active at national, regional and international level to address this issue. The Lao PDR was the second country to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) (Ratified in 2009) in Oslo after the host country, Norway and hosted the First Meeting of State Parties to the CMM in 2010. In addition, the country has acceded to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in 1983 and has been party to the Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War.

Addressing ERW impact remains a top priority for the Lao Government, since 1996, the Government has established UXO-Lao as sole national operator and National

Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action sector was later founded in 2005. Moreover, the Lao PDR was among the first few countries in the world to adopt its own national Millennium development goal called MDG9 in early 2000 and recently launched SDG18 entitled “Lives Safe from UXO”. This national SDG is clearly reflected in the goals and targets set in the current 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020). Likewise, the Government has also adopted legislative framework and provided resources to address UXO challenges by working closely with International Community on UXO clearance and a long-term strategy has been developed.

Mr. President,

With continued international cooperation and assistance, over the past 20 years, more than 53,000 hectares of land has been cleared from UXO (where 80 percent of cleared land for agricultural activities) and casualties were reduced year by year. Number of casualties dropped down from 99 in 2011 to 42 in 2015 and continue to decrease to 22 in 2018, among whom more than half are children. As much as we would like to see the world free from UXO, Mines and ERW, many challenges continue to be faced by affected countries. For Lao PDR, past experience has shown that survey and clearance operation are difficult, time-consuming and very complex, given the geographical landscape and topography of Lao PDR. It is our profound hope that international assistance will increase in Mine Action sector in order for us to fully address these long-term humanitarian challenges.

Mr. President,

The Lao PDR, as the most affected country by Explosive Remnants of War, is of the view that Mines and other explosive remnants of war perpetuate to danger civilian’

lives and pose significant obstacles on socio-economic development. In this context, we have always supported the spirit and humanitarian objective of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. This has been reflected by my country's continued engagement in relevant international and regional efforts to ban landmines. Although the Lao PDR is not yet a state party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, we have been a strong supporter to the main objective of the Convention and has voted in favor of the resolution at the United Nations First Committee as well as at UN General Assembly. In our view, we see Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention as the close sister convention to the Cluster Munitions Convention and we have increased our effort to implement certain clauses of Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention alongside with CCM. Being a small country with resources constraint and limited capacity to fulfill all international obligations. In this light, we are now focusing on prioritizing and maximizing our national capacity to implement the CCM which is closely aligned with social-economic development. Nevertheless, we are confident that with continued support from the international community, the Lao PDR would be able to accede the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in the future.

Mr. President,

On a final note, allow me to also convey our sincere thanks to the sponsorship program that enables our participation at this meeting. In conclusion, the Lao PDR wishes to express its heartfelt gratitude to all donor countries, international organizations, and INGOs for the continued assistance and support extended to UXO/Mine Action sector in the country. In this respect, we firmly believe that by further enhancing international cooperation and assistance our world will be free from UXO, Mines and Explosive Remnants of War.