

**Statement by Mr. Saleumxay KOMMASITH, Director  
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR**

**At Meeting of Standing Committee**

**Geneva, 25-29 May 2009**

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**Check Against Delivery**

**Mr. Chairman,**

I thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak as an observer of this meeting. I congratulate and commend the work well done by this committee with a view to making sure that the Landmine Ban Treaty is effectively implemented. As a non party to this convention, I would like to report on the progress the Lao Government has been undertaking toward accession to this convention.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As you are aware, mines and explosive remnants of war have caused great sufferings to civilian populations in many parts of the world. Although tremendous efforts have been undertaken to relieve the pains in removing mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), much remains to be done, especially in the area of victim assistance. Today, more than 80 countries remain contaminated by explosive remnants of war. As a result, hundreds of new victims are being claimed everyday. Yet, thousands of survivors are longing for a helping hand. To build a safer environment for affected-communities and to meet the needs of survivors, every effort that further enhances international assistance and cooperation should therefore be made.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As the most heavily bombed country per capita the world has ever known, nowhere are the lasting impacts of unexploded ordnance (UXO) more evident than in the Lao PDR. During the Indochina conflict from 1964 to 1973, nearly three million tons of bombs were dropped on the territory of the country. Up to 30% of this ordnance, including millions of cluster bomblets or locally known as "bombies" or "killer toys" failed to detonate, leaving as many as 78 million unexploded bomblets littering the landscape. Today, 14 out of 17 provinces in Laos remain contaminated by UXO that claimed hundreds of new victims each year, more than 40% of which are children. Apart from causing unacceptable threat and harm to civilians, UXO has also hampered the socio-economic development of the country. It has actually constrained the country's capacity to live up to its international commitments, including the MDGs and achieve poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to address these serious humanitarian and development problems caused by UXO contamination, the Lao PDR Trust Fund was established in 1995, and the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) subsequently launched in 1996 with the support of UNDP, UNICEF, and donor countries. For the vision of communities free from the threat of UXO to be realized, the Lao Government has adopted a National Strategic Plan: "The Safe Path Forward" for 2003-2013, which focuses on the humanitarian, social and environmental dimensions within the framework of overall socio-economic development and poverty eradication. Last week, I personally had an opportunity to chair the first review meeting of this strategy, which is part of the comprehensive review process. The objective of the review is to mainstream the UXO strategy into the National Development Strategy and taking into account the state's international obligations prescribed under international instruments particularly Convention on Cluster Munitions, Convention on the Rights of people with disability as well as the Mine Ban Treaty.

Mr. Chairman,

As regard with the Mine Ban Treaty, allow me to share with the Committee the current progress toward our accession. As we are aware, as the most affected country by the explosive remnant of war, the Lao PDR has long been supported the spirit and humanitarian objective of the Landmine Ban Treaty. Although, the country is not yet a state party to this Treaty, Lao PDR has been participating in all international and regional undertakings to ban landmines. In 2004 the Government made a decision to accede to this convention but yet needed some time to prepare itself to meet all obligations stated therein. Two years ago stating from 2007 onward, the Lao Government has voted in favour of the UNGA resolutions on Assistance in Mine Action and it will continue to do so. Two month ago, the Lao PDR has also ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This action has been in line with the commitment and policy by the Government to reduce the impacts caused by the remnant of war and eventually put an end to the scourge of UXO/mines.

With the current development in the implementation of Landmine Ban Treaty, we are now considering a voluntary transparency report, which can help the international community deeper understand the facts and reality on the ground as well as to demonstrate the desire and the intention of the Lao PDR toward the goal and aspiration of this Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me avail myself of this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Lao PDR Government and people, our profound gratitude to all donor countries, International Organizations and International NGOs for their generous assistance in support of our efforts to address this long-term humanitarian challenge. It is our earnest hope that greater aid and assistance would be forthcoming from the international community to the Lao PDR in her continued drive to achieve its objectives outlined in the National Strategy on UXO.

Thank you.