

**Statement by H. E Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun,
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
Head of Lao delegation on General Exchange of Views
at the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions
11 September 2012, Oslo, Norway**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the Lao delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Kongstad, on your election as President of the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. I am confident that with your able leadership, our meeting will be guided to a successful conclusion. I would also like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Norway for the excellent organization of the meeting as well as for the warm hospitality extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Oslo, the birthplace of our Convention.

Let me take this opportunity to convey our deep thanks to Lebanon as well, for the very successful hosting of the Second Meeting of States Parties in Beirut last year and for its excellent presidency throughout this past year.

Mr. President,

Oslo represents a milestone for the Convention on Cluster Munitions. It was the place where the Oslo Declaration was adopted in 2007, which triggered a series of negotiations resulting in the convention to ban a weapon that causes unacceptable harm to civilians. It was also the place where the

Convention was opened for signature. It is most fitting that it has become known around the world as the Oslo Convention.

To my country, Oslo has additional meaning and significance, since it brought forward to a global audience, the untold story of the country most affected by Cluster Munitions in the world.

Mr. President,

Four years after the Convention was opened for signature in this historic city, we return with more progress to report and more determination to fulfill the noble spirit and objectives of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The number of States Parties has increased to 75, testimony to the growing support from the international community to ban cluster munitions. It is also testimony to the collective, tireless efforts of States Parties, international organizations and civil society to universalize the Convention. I would like to warmly welcome all who have ratified or acceded to our Convention. The growing number of States Parties helps to further stigmatize cluster munitions and sends a strong message to the rest of the world community that cluster munitions are a weapon of the past and should never be used again.

Despite the increase in the number of States Parties, the road to a world free from threat of cluster munitions will be a long and challenging one. Achieving our goal will require further collective and cooperative effort from states, international organizations and civil society.

Mr. President,

In our experience, the presence of UXO is often linked with poverty. Therefore, our government is stepping up efforts to integrate UXO clearance into our national development agenda, especially poverty eradication. This intention, combined with our determination to meet all of our obligations under the Convention, led to a revision of our UXO national strategy. Our new UXO strategy called "The Safe Path Forward II", will guide work throughout the sector to the year 2020.

We are now developing a detailed work plan for the sector, based upon The Safe Path Forward II.

Mr. President,

In addition to our own investment in the UXO sector, last year Lao PDR raised just over \$20 M from the international community to support UXO sector activities in Lao PDR. This was complemented by another \$10M from the private sector which supported clearance in order to undertake a variety of commercial projects in our country.

In order to fulfill our obligations under the Oslo Convention, to further protect our people and to advance our national development objectives, Lao PDR would like to accelerate our survey and clearance activities significantly and we have calculated that for 2013, Laos can responsibly utilize an additional \$20M for a total annual budget of \$50M. Our Government will do all that we can with our own resources, but it will require continued and increased generosity from donors to help us to achieve this target. We thank all past and potential donors for your kind consideration of our situation in Laos, and of our needs as just outlined.

Mr. President,

Exploring and testing various technologies and methods to expedite clearance has been intensified by various agencies. District level surveys are providing more accurate and detailed data. We are expanding our District Focused Approach (DFA) and we will share our data and assessment in due course.

We regret to inform you that mechanical clearance pilot project by Komatsu from Japan which used the typical anti-personnel mine clearance machine did not yield a satisfactory outcome and came to an end. We were informed that for the machine to be effective, it needed a major modification. However, I would like to thank the company for taking on the challenge and its very good intention to explore ways to accelerate the clearance of contaminated land.

Victim assistance is another area where my government has given more attention. All UXO survivors have received basic assistance in terms of health care, rehabilitation, professional training and socio-economic reintegration, as necessary. Nonetheless, more must be done to ensure better service, broader coverage and a more timely response.

Mr. President,

I would like to reaffirm our strong commitment to the spirit and the letter of the Convention. We will try our best to promote its universalisation and full implementation.

Once again, we congratulate all States Parties that joined the Convention since our Second Meeting. We urge all signatories and non-signatories to consider ratifying or acceding to the Convention as soon as possible to ensure that the scourge of cluster munitions, experienced by my country and many other countries around the world, never occurs again.

I hope that during this Third Meeting of States Parties, we are able to take stock of what has been achieved in the implementation of the Vientiane Action Plan and to identify what is required to facilitate the implementation of the Convention and to enable all States Parties meet their obligations under the Convention.

Last but not least, I would like, on behalf of the Government and Lao people, to once again express our thanks and gratitude to donors countries, International Organizations and NGOs that provide generous assistance on addressing the UXO issue in my country.

I thank you for your kind attention.