

Statement by Lao PDR
General Exchange of Views

**4th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster
Munitions**

10 - 13 September 2013, Lusaka, Zambia

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Wylbur C. Simuusa

At the outset, on behalf of the Lao delegation, I would like to congratulate your Excellency, ~~Mr. Wylbur C. Simuusa~~, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zambia, on your election as President of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. I am confident that with your expert and 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 Zambia 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 Lusaka.

Let me also take this opportunity to convey our deep thanks to Norway for the very successful hosting of the Third Meeting of States Parties in Oslo last year, and for the excellent work of Ambassador Steffen Kongstad and his team throughout the Norwegian Presidency.

Mr. President,

The Lao delegation is very happy to be here with other States Parties, - with the support and partnership of signatories, UN agencies, international

organizations and civil society - to report on our progress in fulfilling our respective responsibilities under the Convention, to describe the challenges we face, and to seek solutions - together. It is our collective determination to work closely with all others that will enable all States Parties to fulfill the noble spirit and the objectives of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The number of States Parties to the Convention has increased from 75 to 83 in the past year, and the total number of States Parties and signatories to 112, testimony to the growing support from the international community to ban cluster munitions. It is also testimony to the tireless efforts of States Parties and signatories, international organizations and civil society to universalize the Convention.

Lao PDR warmly welcomes all who have ratified or acceded to our Convention. Our growing numbers serves to further stigmatize cluster munitions and to send a strong message to the world community, that cluster munitions should never be used again.

Mr. President,

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is of great national significance to Lao PDR. On a per capita basis, we have the sad distinction of being the most heavily bombed nation in history. During the ~~Second~~ Indochina war from 1964 to 1973, more than two million tons of ordnance was dropped on Laos - almost one ton for every man, woman and child in Lao PDR, at the time.

Among the bombs, were approximately 270 million cluster submunitions whose indiscriminate wide area effect and high failure rate render them extremely dangerous for the people of Lao, even 40 years after the fighting ended.

Based on U.S. bombing data, it is estimated that 80 million cluster submunitions remained unexploded after the war. There have been more than 20,000 casualties since then, and until very recently, Lao PDR was suffering more than 300 casualties per year.

In addition to their deadly humanitarian impact, cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance are a major obstacle to our national development. They restrict safe access to valuable agricultural land and inhibit the building of schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructure.

Their clearance will help Lao PDR to emerge from LDC status by 2020. It is also a pre-condition for the citizens of Lao in contaminated areas, to live life without the terrible and persistent risk of death or serious injury.

Mr. President,

Our government is stepping up efforts to integrate UXO sector activity into our national development agenda, especially rural development and poverty eradication. In 2010, we created a 9th Millennium Development Goal, specifically to address the UXO situation throughout our country.

In June 2012, Government approved a new national Strategy that will guide the UXO sector through to 2020. In the past year, we have conducted extensive consultations in each contaminated region of our country to establish priorities for survey and clearance that will have maximum impact of the achievement of our national development objectives. We are now developing a multi-year workplan, reflecting this adjustment in priorities for the sector that will be complemented by annual work-plans. The expected result is much greater development impact from UXO sector activity. At the same time, we will continue to address areas of high risk anywhere in Laos as they arise.

We continue to test various technologies and methods to expedite survey and clearance, in particular. We recently concluded a pilot project in the area of survey, called the District Focused Approach and will soon be holding a major workshop with operators to incorporate lessons learned into standard survey methodology. Among the most important lessons learned, is the importance of non-technical as well as technical survey, and a participatory approach that includes land owners, local authorities and other stakeholders.

We also seek to increase and expand survey activities, beginning with the development focus areas, then to other areas of the country as well.

Mr. President,

To date, almost all land released in Laos was done on the basis of full clearance. As a result, only 5,000 to 6,000 hectares of land has been released each year – significantly less than the target of 20,000 hectares established by Government.

We are now exploring and developing land release methodology, appropriate to the Lao context that will enable us to release land on the basis of survey alone, where there is no evidence of contamination. Combined with an expansion in survey activity, we hope in a few years to be releasing several times more land than at present.

Still, survey and clearance takes time and we must give people the knowledge to avoid injury until clearance can be carried out. Although the number of casualties has dropped dramatically in recent years, from more than 300 to under 60 last year, that is still 60 too many.

We continue to improve risk education materials and methodologies and seek to expand coverage even beyond contaminated areas to all provinces in Lao PDR, to be certain that our people are aware of the danger of UXO no matter where they might move to or travel in the country. We are also using multi media – especially radio in rural areas, and are also considering offering risk education at secondary as well as primary school level, which is currently being offered.

Victim assistance is another area where my government has given more attention – but needs to do much more to ensure better service, broader coverage and a more timely response to the full range of needs of survivors – physical, psycho-social and economic. Our goal remains their full rehabilitation and reintegration as full productive members of their communities.

We are about to finalize a Victim Assistance Strategy for the National Regulatory Authority which includes a proposal for the NRA to work closely with the National Committee for Disabled Persons to address the needs of UXO sector victims within this broader context. It is further proposed to

assist in the development of a sector wide strategy for the Disabled and UXO survivors.

To increase national capacity in all areas of the sector, we intend to further strengthen the National Regulatory Authority and our national operator, UXO Lao. We also seek to further develop the humanitarian mine action capacity of the Lao Army and to give them the equipment and resources to undertake humanitarian survey and clearance on an ongoing basis.

Mr. President,

All of this takes resources. Lao PDR would like to increase our budget for the sector from a recent average of \$30 million per year to \$50 million.

I would like, on behalf of the Government and Lao people, to express our deep thanks and gratitude to all donors countries that provide generous assistance on addressing the daunting UXO challenge in my country. We hope that further assistance will be forthcoming.

The Government of Lao PDR is also is committed to increasing its direct financial support to the sector. In addition, in November of last year, the Government issued a notification that all development projects to be undertaken in suspected contaminated areas must plan for survey and clearance as necessary, and build the cost into their budgets. This requirement could have significant impact on the level of resources directed to the sector in future years.

We wish to thank the UNDP for administering the UXO Sector Trust Fund, co-chairing the UXO sector working group (along with the USA), and for providing valuable technical and other support to the NRA and UXO Lao. We warmly thank other technical advisers and all operators in the sector in Lao PDR.

Mr. President,

The Lao delegation would like to reaffirm our strong commitment to the spirit and the letter of the Convention. We will continue to promote its universalisation and full implementation.

We hope that during this Fourth 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.

I thank you for your kind attention.