

Statement by Lao PDR

National Implementation Measures

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

Lusaka, Zambia,

10-13 September 2013

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our delegation wishes to begin by congratulating and thanking New Zealand for its continued excellent work in co-coordinating the Working Group on National Implementation Measures.

Dear Colleagues,

Lao PDR was extremely happy to be the second country to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions, after Norway, to whom we are very grateful for initiating the Oslo Process that led to this Convention.

From the start, Lao PDR was aware of the strong commitment that would be required by our nation and by the international community in order to meet the many obligations contained in the Convention. I wish to assure distinguished colleagues that we remain fully committed to all the provisions of this Convention. I take this opportunity to report on some of the national measures we have taken towards its implementation and our plans for the future.

By way of background, in 2010 in advance of the first MSP in Vientiane, the Lao Government developed a 9th Millennium Development Goal, specifically to address the UXO problem in Lao PDR.

In June of 2012, the Government officially approved a new UXO Sector Strategy entitled *The Safe Path Forward II (SPF II)* that will guide work in the UXO Sector through to 2020. SPF II is aligned with the most recent 5-year

National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDV VII) and will bring together humanitarian and national development priorities for the UXO sector to a far greater extent than in the past.

We seek to achieve a situation where people from the most highly impacted communities live free from the effects of UXO and to target almost 200 Development Focus Areas that have been identified as Development Priorities. This will help us achieve MDG 9 and to advance progress in other MDGs. It will also help Lao PDR to reduce poverty and to meet another major national aspiration, to graduate from the list of Least Developed Countries by 2020.

For maximum efficiency, clearance operations will continue to combine pre-planned, systematic activities – in priority development areas - with roving clearance operations that can address humanitarian high risk situations on a rapid-response basis, when and wherever they arise throughout the country.

At this time, there are approximately 2,500 clearance personnel working full time, around 15 % of whom are women. The cadre of female clearance personnel will continue to grow over time.

We are also developing the humanitarian mine action capacity of the Lao Army. Fifteen army personnel have already received training. More will be trained and equipped with the intention of undertaking ongoing survey and clearance, to complement existing national capacity.

In 2012, approximately 6,040 hectares of land were cleared and approximately 83,260 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed, through the efforts of national and international operators in both regular and roving clearance activities.

We have concluded a District Focused Approach Pilot Project, which includes non-technical and technical survey and will be incorporating lessons learned into standard survey methodology in the coming months. Among other things, this should produce more accurate and detailed data on contaminated areas, giving us a clearer picture of the nature and full extent of the UXO contamination problem.

With an estimated 8,470 km² still contaminated by cluster munitions and an area potentially up to ten times larger contaminated by UXO of various types, Lao PDR has a long way to go. For this reason, we wish to expand and accelerate our survey and clearance activities.

As mentioned during the General Exchange of Views, we are also 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.

However, this takes time and people must know how to avoid danger from UXO until clearance can be undertaken. On the extremely positive side, clearance and risk education activities have helped to reduce the number of victims to fewer than 60 last year, from an average of 300 just a few years ago. But of course, our ultimate goal is no casualties from UXO.

NRA is exploring expanding risk education to all provinces in Lao PDR, to help protect people who might move to or travel in contaminated areas. In addition to offering risk education in at risk villages and at primary school level, we will endeavor to provide risk education at the secondary school level as well.

Victim assistance also requires more attention. An estimated 20,000 survivors remain in need of some form of support. Although most have had their immediate emergency medical needs met, many need further medical treatment, rehabilitation services, educational and vocational training and incomes.

Lao PDR continues to take measures to improve our Survivor Tracking System in order to gather detailed information on their injuries, to direct survivors to appropriate service providers and to track their progress over the long term.

The Technical Working Group on Victim Assistance continues to meet on a regular basis and has submitted for final approval, a Victim Assistance Strategy for the NRA. If agreed, this will include a mandate to work with the

National Committee for Disabled Persons to develop a sector wide strategy that would address the needs of UXO survivors within this broader context.

Last year the sector effectively utilized \$30M and we believe that we could quickly and responsibly scale activities upward to \$50M per year, if sufficient resources can be mobilized – and we hope that the international community, to whom we are most grateful, will help in this regard. The Government is also committed to increasing its financial contribution to the sector over time and has also issued notification that all development projects in potentially contaminated areas must include plans for UXO survey and, if there is evidence of contamination, then for clearance, and to include the cost of these into project budgets.

In order to ensure that all funds continue to be put to good use, with the support of the UNDP, we will conduct a comprehensive capacity assessment of the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) and UXO Lao and will take any necessary measures to ensure the best performance of national and a growing number of international operators in all three main areas of activity - clearance, risk education and victim assistance.

At the policy and legal level, though a full State Party, Lao PDR has yet to put in place legislation that will impose legal sanctions to prevent and suppress activities prohibited to a State Party, undertaken by persons or on territory under our jurisdiction or control, as required by Article 9 of the Convention. I wish to re-confirm that it is Lao PDRs intention to establish a law or laws that will adequately and fully reflect the high standards achieved in this Convention, and we urge all States Parties to do the same.

We look forward to further discussions with other State Parties, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN and others as we develop our legislation.

Lao PDR will continue to do its best to implement all the provisions of the Convention and look forward to the day when our nation is free of the threat of cluster munitions and other UXO.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.