

Statement on Clearance and Risk Reduction

In Lao PDR

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of the Lao Delegation, I would like to express our appreciation to Australia, as Friend of the President on Clearance and Risk reduction education, for its tireless works in coordinating this matter. Allow me also to share with you a short update on the Lao PDR's efforts to implement the provisions of the Vientiane Action Plan related to "Clearance and destruction of cluster munitions remnants and risk education activities".

At present the total clearance capacity in Lao PDR is about 4,000 hectares a year. This includes clearance by the National operator UXO Lao, as well as clearance by international NGOs and commercial companies. For instance, in 2010, we have cleared 4,062 ha, of which 3,530 ha by humanitarian clearance operators, and 532 ha by commercial operators.

The Vientiane Action Plan calls on affected States Parties to "increase in 2011 their clearance and risk reduction capacities".

UXO Lao and other operators have been investigating technology to increase this production through innovative use of existing technologies and introducing new technologies. Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) has been experimenting with UXO discrimination technology used in a land release process that targets cluster munitions, while UXO Lao has used detectors that ignore small items of scrap and fragments and only alarm on a half BLU 26 and larger munitions. If we look at recent years, this process has increased production from 1,600 ha in 2005 to 2,600 ha in 2010.

UXO Lao also intends to trial the use of geophysical technology in 2011 to see how it can be utilized in large area and road clearance.

Another major contributor to land release has been the introduction of technical survey and the revision of national standards to allow for land release after technical survey. This has accounted for about 400 ha of land being released using only about 5% of the field capacity of UXO Lao. Other operators are also employing these methods. In UXO Lao the process is quite

refined with a desk survey being carried out using the US Bombing data and previous UXO Lao records of operations in the village to be targeted. This then defines whether a Technical Survey Team is sent or a full clearance team to any specific clearance requested site. If the contamination is low and/or the previous experience shows low or no contamination, then a technical survey team is sent to the site. They use large loops and magnetometers linked to data loggers to check the area. If the soil conditions do not allow the use of large loops or Magnetometers, then the team does a 25% random sampling of the area using normal UXO locators. In the future UXO Lao hopes to increase the use of such procedures and technologies.

The National Regulatory Authority for the UXO sector (NRA), urged by its Chairman to “ speed up clearance activities so people can earn a living and live without the risk posed by unexploded bomb,” has recently initiated a debate and exchange of information among operators on ways to accelerate clearance. The next step of this process should be a workshop, organized in cooperation with the GICHD.

The Vientiane Action Plan also calls on affected States Parties to “identify as precisely as possible locations and size of all cluster munitions contaminated areas” within one year of entry into force. As you know, the Lao PDR has the world’s worst contamination from cluster munitions remnants. Therefore, the NRA, working closely with clearance operators, is currently establishing a process of comprehensive village and district survey to confirm more accurately the extent of UXO contamination and priority areas for clearance. This process will eventually produce district clearance plans. Local authorities from affected communities are closely involved throughout the process.

Concerning risk reduction education, activities in the Lao PDR are evolving, from the provision of traditional awareness-raising sessions on the consequences of unexploded ordnance to more complex and targeted processes focused on behavior change. Such processes involve data analysis to identify high-risk groups, development of new MRE materials (in local languages where appropriate), community liaison, development of government policies on scrap metal, as well as teacher training programmes and the growing involvement of Buddhist monks. Some new operators have also joined the sector recently. A survey of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) designed to assess the impact of risk education materials is currently ongoing. The Strategic Plan for MRE in Lao PDR is also under review following an external evaluation of the previous strategy.

As you may have heard already, Lao PDR has developed a National Strategic Plan for UXO Action “The Safe Path Forward II”, 2011-2020 that aims to address the initial problems and priorities in community areas, agricultural land and economic development zones in poor districts. This will be presented in a 10 year plan of action currently prepared by the Lao Government.

This is linked with the creation of the specific MDG 9 that was launched at the High level Round Table meeting in Vientiane in October 2010 to include UXO as a major issue for MDG goals in Lao PDR.

Some results of these actions may account for the dramatic decrease of UXO casualties in 2010 to 117 from 304 per annum in 2008.

However, the greatest need in Lao PDR is greater levels of funding to allow an expansion of UXO Lao and other operators so that more teams can be deployed. The ideal situation would be for one clearance team and one roving team in every very poor, poor and impacted district. This would allow greater concentration of effort and reduce travel time for teams moving between tasks and allow the clearance of the most needed agricultural land in 10 years and most priority land. We know that this means we will require an extension to the clearance target set in the treaty, but will certainly allow the impact of UXO on the people of Lao PDR to be reduced significantly.

Before concluding, I would like, on behalf of the Lao Delegation, to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to donor countries and International organizations for their continued assistance and support to our clearance and risk reduction education programmes.

Thank you for your attention