

**Statement by Lao PDR
Clearance and Risk Reduction
4th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions
10-13 September 2013, Lusaka, Zambia**

Co-Chairs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by saying what a great pleasure it has been for Lao PDR to co-chair this working group with our Irish colleagues. Thank you, Ireland, for your great support and partnership.

Between 1996 and the end of July 2013, the UXO Sector in Lao PDR cleared a total of 401 square kilometres. In addition, UXO operators conducted operations that have resulted in the destruction of 623,070 submunitions, including 22,897 submunitions since the beginning of this year.

Risk Education sessions were conducted during 15,000 visits to schools and communities throughout the country. 6,135 teachers in 9 UXO contaminated provinces were trained to provide risk education in 1,957 schools. The total number of beneficiaries was 2,825,145. Of these, 1,411,922 were children and 1,412,226 were adults. In 2012, 520 village volunteers conducted risk education. This included 823 visits to villages in at-risk areas, benefiting 173,646 villagers.

The current estimate of land contaminated by cluster munitions is approximately 8,470 km². This contamination is a significant blockage to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, inhibits poverty reduction and rural development and prevents Laos from realising its aspiration to graduate from the list of Least Developed Countries by 2020.

Our current estimate of cluster munitions contamination is based largely on US bombing records which indicate that there were approximately 70,000 individual target locations throughout the country, against which there were often multiple strikes, each with an average 12 hectare spread.

As we informed the previous meeting, Lao PDR has been re-focussing a process to define the remaining UXO contaminated areas. This is quite a big job. Through enhanced survey methodology, based in part on a District Focused Approach pilot project recently undertaken - with the excellent work and support of Norwegian People's Aid, Mines Advisory Group and Handicap

International - we hope to further refine our clearance plans based on more accurate and detailed data.

At the same time, we are placing priority for survey and, where required, for clearance, on development focus areas identified by Government in its Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Plan. This will help advance efforts to reduce poverty, to achieve multiple MDG targets and help Lao PDR to graduate from the list of Least Developed Countries by 2020. In real terms, it will also mean that the risk of UXO has been removed from key areas of our nation.

Like many countries, we have been giving further consideration to "Land Release" principles and processes. To date, almost all land released in Lao PDR has been on the basis of full clearance. We are now developing methodology, suitable to the Lao context, that can enable us to release land on the basis of survey alone, where there is no evidence of contamination. This could result in the release of land at a much higher rate than in the past.

In addition to a focus on survey, we strive to bring more resources and technology to help in this task. We are undergoing a programme of upgrading old equipment within the main national operator organisation, UXO Lao, and are actively engaged in testing and trials of a variety of instruments and machines, including detectors and data loggers, for example, that can help us more effectively map contamination.

Since our last meeting in Oslo, an additional operator, the HALO Trust, is now operational in Savannakhet province, complementing the existing capacity of UXO Lao and Handicap International. This means that the current capacity in Laos includes 17 clearance organisations (11 commercial, 5 INGO and UXO Lao, the national clearance organisation). There are now more than 3,500 staff working in the UXO sector.

The significant clearance activity throughout the country, combined with on-going risk education activities and greater public awareness, has contributed to a continuing decrease in casualties. In 2012, a total of 56 victims were recorded – the lowest annual figure recorded since the Indochina war and less than 20% of the number of casualties of just a few years ago.

On behalf of the Lao delegation, I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to donors, to international organisations and NGOs for your continued assistance and support.

Thank you for your kind attention.