

**Press Release**

For Immediate Release

10 August 2009

Celebrating Lao PDR's ethnic diversity on the International Day of the World's Indigenous People

A celebration of the Lao PDR's ethnic diversity was held in Vientiane on Monday 10 August 2009, marking the International Day of the World's Indigenous People.

With welcoming speeches by Dr Sayamang Vongsack, Vice-President of the Lao Front for National Construction, and Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the Lao PDR, the event was an opportunity to both enjoy cultural performances and discover more about the customs and traditions and the development challenges facing the many peoples across the country.

Since 1994, this important Day has been celebrated internationally both as a symbol of hope and a practical demonstration of the international commitment to the human rights of indigenous peoples. The aim of the celebration is to bring attention to indigenous peoples and to further strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development.

For the Lao PDR, the International Day for Indigenous Peoples is particularly significant because, together, no fewer than 49 ethnic groups represent the rich human diversity and the cultural heritage of the country.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by a majority of United Nations member states including the Lao PDR, is evidence of the international commitment to respect cultural diversity and the right to be different. Above all, there is an international obligation for each country to promote an environment that allows citizens to practice their culture, and the Constitution of the Lao PDR recognizes that all ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve, and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own groups and of the nation.

As Sonam Yangchen Rana, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the Lao PDR remarked, this International Day is also an opportunity to take a closer look at all the ethnic groups in the country to focus on the challenges that confront them in the development process. "As with most other nations," she noted, "there are important challenges that confront some ethnic groups particularly in the remote mountain regions that

must be acknowledged. The acknowledgement of these challenges allows the nation to look for sustainable solutions to promote national unity and social justice as the foundation for a prosperous Lao nation.”

Notes:

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The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government to improve the life of all citizens, especially those most vulnerable. We shall continue to work closely with the Government and all development partners for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Our collective endeavour is to assist the people of Lao PDR to achieve progress and better standards of living for all.