



United Nations

Working in Lao PDR

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Landmark Event

Government of Lao PDR leads signing of treaty banning cluster munitions

Page 2 Interview: Dr Maligna Saignavongs, NRA

Features

Page 3 **"In my Own Words"**
Working as a Deminer

Page 4 **Delivering as One**



Page 6 **Human Trafficking:**
Lessons and Challenges



Key role for Lao PDR in international ban on cluster munitions



The Lao Government, with support from UNDP, has played a leading role in international efforts to establish one of the most significant humanitarian and disarmament treaties of the decade banning the production, transfer, use and stockpiling of cluster munitions, known locally as "bombies".

Lao PDR, the state most affected by cluster munitions on a per capita basis, was the second of 94 countries, after the host country Norway, to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions during the ceremony held in Oslo on 3 December 2008. The Lao Government, represented by Mr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, offered to host the first meeting of States Party to the Convention, one year after the 30th country ratifies and the Convention comes into force.

[continued on page 2](#)

The path towards a worldwide ban on cluster munitions



Mr Ta Duangchan, cluster munition explosion survivor, spoke at the Xiengkhuang Conference and attended the Oslo signing ceremony.

Dr. Maligna Saignavongs, National Director of the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for the UXO/Mine Action sector was involved throughout the Oslo Process. He describes one of the earlier campaign conferences held in Dublin, and the importance of the Convention to Lao PDR.

Dr. Maligna, what was the atmosphere during the Dublin Cluster Munitions Convention (CMC) Conference?
The working pace was brisk, because participants wanted to reach an agreement on a strong Convention in two weeks. The Conference was split up; one overall Committee discussed the draft Convention article by article, and a number of Working Groups, discussed conflicting issues. Generally the atmosphere was constructive, although negotiations were intense and sometimes rather tense. Outside the negotiating rooms there was active campaigning by the Cluster Munitions Coalition. The adoption of the Convention by consensus was welcomed with huge applause, for having realized huge steps towards a ban on cluster munitions within 18 months.

What does the adoption of the CMC mean to Lao PDR?
The Convention contains strong provisions on cluster munitions clearance, risk reduction education, victim assistance and international cooperation and assistance. I think the Convention, once entered into force, will serve as a legal basis for Lao PDR, as the most affected country, and as a State party, to seek international assistance in the crucial issues of clearance, risk education and victim assistance.

The global Oslo Process achieved the ambitious aim of concluding a treaty banning cluster munitions in just 18 months. At the February 2008 conference in Wellington, New Zealand, the Lao PDR was among countries calling for a clear and concise treaty to ensure a comprehensive ban of the deadly weapons.

In October, the Lao PDR hosted the South East Asia Regional Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Xiengkhuang, the first held in a severely UXO affected area. Through visits to school risk education classes, demonstrations of land clearance and meetings with UXO accident survivors, delegates encountered some of the daily realities that people face when living with the constant danger of UXO.

How will the CMC affect people throughout Lao PDR?
Cluster munitions contamination causes long-term humanitarian problems and is a major impediment to development. For the affected communities, contamination is closely linked to poverty, disability and food vulnerability. The Convention contains strong provisions on the clearance and victim assistance that communities need, so the consequences cannot be otherwise than positive; provided, of course, that we receive substantial international assistance for our UXO operations.

What are the next steps needed and how can the UN support ratification of this Convention?
The Lao Government has signed the Convention and the next step is to ratify it. This is a domestic legal procedure to be undertaken by the National Assembly. At this stage, what the UN can do is to support us in organizing seminars or workshops, in order to disseminate the Convention to the NA Members, particularly the rights and obligations under the Convention of Lao PDR as an affected State Party.

Interviewed by: Jussi Kainulainen,
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Photos: top left - NRA/Jim Holmes
top right - CMC/Stan Fradelizi

“In my Own Words”

Working as a Deminer in Sekong Province

“Being a deminer is very dangerous, but I want to do this work to help the Lao people and the country.”

UXO Lao is a nationally executed project established in 1996, responsible for clearing land of unexploded ordnance (UXO) for agriculture and other socio-economic development purposes. It operates in 9 of the most UXO impacted provinces, has a workforce of around 1,020 and is supported by 9 donor countries.

Xayphone Seankhambou is a female member of a UXO Lao clearance team working in Sekong Province. In an interview with UXO Lao she talks about the challenges and rewards of her work.



“My name is Xayphone and I come from Lamarm district, Sekong province. I’m 22 years old and the youngest of six children. My father is a soldier and my mother is a housewife, and we also farm. I only reached 5th year of secondary school as my mother became ill and I had to care for her. After she recovered I heard from friends that UXO Lao needed staff, so I applied and joined UXO Lao in about 2002.

I wanted to do this job to help solve the UXO problem in our country. I’ve seen people from neighbouring villages in hospital after being injured by UXO and I’ve seen people who died from their injuries. Even though we haven’t had UXO accidents in our village, we know there is UXO out there so we’re afraid to farm our land.

The most dangerous part of my job is when I find a very old bomb that I can’t identify. Another dangerous activity is if we are doing a demolition on site and we don’t have a big tree to hide behind as the bombs go off.

It’s difficult to do my job when I have to use an old detector which makes the indicator noise all the time. I keep digging to investigate, but usually I find nothing! We don’t have enough new detectors.

The most exciting part is when my team leader asks me to identify a bomb and work out the best way to remove or destroy it. I’m well trained and I follow the procedures, so I’m not scared.

I get along well with the men in my team. In the beginning it was difficult for me as I was the only female team member. Now they accept me as one of them. But sometimes it is still difficult, especially if we have to work and stay in remote areas.

I know and admire Ms. Chantavone, the first female Senior Ordnance Disposal Expert (SEOD) in Lao PDR, and I want to be like her. I think most of the female deminers feel the same. I would like to continue working with UXO Lao, even though my salary is not high, perhaps as a team leader or even a Senior Ordnance Disposal Expert (SEOD).

I believe my work with UXO Lao is vital as it helps the Lao people. It helps the country have more land safe from UXO for farming and other development activities, and fewer people become victims of UXO.”

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Delivering as One

UN launches \$10m Joint Appeal for Flood Victims

In August 2008, heavy rainfall in and around the Mekong watershed caused the most severe floods in the country in living memory. A total of 865 villages in eleven provinces (48,925 households with approximately 200,000 people) were affected. A Rapid Assessment conducted by the IASC in-country Team for Natural Disaster Response Preparedness found that the flood damages to health, nutrition and sanitation were severe, in addition to the floods compromising a major source of livelihoods in the agricultural sector.

The first ever international appeal for assistance - the Joint Appeal for Flood Recovery and Rehabilitation in Lao PDR - was launched by UN agencies and partners who assisted the Government in the response.



Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The theme of a concert staged by the Government on 9 December to highlight the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for young people was *Dignity and Justice for All of Us*. As Mr Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, noted at an official ceremony on that day, the Constitution of the Lao PDR provides for the fundamental rights and duties of Lao citizens, and Lao people without distinction of gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnicity are equal before the law.

Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, the UN Resident Coordinator/ UNDP Resident Representative called for celebration of the achievement of the Lao PDR in pursuing its commitments consistent with the Universal Declaration and urged that the country learns from challenges and builds on successes, pledging continued UN support.

Coordinating Responses to Avian and Human Influenza

Lao PDR is recognised globally for well-coordinated and coherent cross-sectoral responses to outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza and human influenza. The Office of the UN Resident Coordinator coordinates support to the Government for surveillance, outbreak response, communication and awareness raising activities and rapid containment as well as pandemic preparedness planning for the health sector.

In 2008 the UN, through FAO, UNICEF and WHO in cooperation with the ADB and the World Bank, supported the National Avian and Human Influenza Coordination Office (NAHICO) in swiftly reacting to and containing avian influenza outbreaks in birds in Luangnamtha, Luangprabang, Oudomxay and Xayabury provinces.

Supporting UXO Clearance and Awareness

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) limit physical safety, livelihoods and food security in Lao PDR, and injures or kills one person almost every day.

The UN, through UNDP, works with UXO Lao in land clearance and, supported by UNICEF, in raising community awareness about the dangers of UXO. The UXO Sector Working Group, co-chaired by UNDP, advocates for a programme-based approach to the UXO problem in line with the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness so that national ownership is promoted and national capacities are strengthened.

Round Table Process - Forum for Joint Discussions

Led by the Government of Lao PDR, supported by UNDP, the Round Table Process promotes in-depth dialogue with development partners in order to improve the effectiveness of international assistance.

Co-chairing the Round Table Implementation Meeting in November, Mr. Ajay Chhibber, UN Assistant Secretary General /UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, noted that the rapidly unfolding global financial crisis could have significant implications for developing countries including Lao PDR, affecting achievement of national development goals including the MDGs.

Priority areas under discussion clustered around five themes; potential impacts of global financial insecurity on development, social sector issues, natural resource management, the enabling environment for the private sector, and participatory development.



Delivering as One to Support the National Assembly

On 24 November 2008 the United Nations held a signing ceremony for the Joint United Nations Programme: Support to an Effective National Assembly (SELNA). Building on years of separate initiatives by UN agencies and other development partners, this integrated approach aims to deliver support coherently, comprehensively and efficiently in line with the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Capacity building is the core of the programme, which will focus on legislative, oversight and representative functions, and strengthening administrative mechanisms as well as programme implementation capacities of the National Assembly.

The programme will operate from 2009 to 2012, supported by UNDP, UNODC, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and development partners the European Union, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Government of Germany, the Government of Singapore and the World Bank with a budget of \$4.5m.

Joint UN Programme of Support on AIDS

The Joint UN team on AIDS in the Lao PDR, comprising of HIV focal points of different UN agencies and facilitated by the UNAIDS country coordinator, was established in March 2006, demonstrating the commitment of the UN system to a harmonized, aligned and coordinated response in support of national efforts to address the HIV epidemic across the country.

The Joint UN team on AIDS has been developing a Joint UN Programme of Support on AIDS (JUPSA) which serves as the overall UN framework of support to the national response in the Lao PDR, and operationalizes the HIV-related outputs defined in the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Lao PDR. The JUPSA utilizes both the comparative advantages of different UN agencies and synergy effects of joint action.

Joint Working for Improved Nutrition

Statistics on malnourishment in Lao PDR are alarming, with 40 percent of children under five being stunted. The UN is working with the Government as a priority to promote food security and nutritional wellbeing among the poor. On 1 December 2008 HE the Prime Minister signed the Implementation Decree for the Lao National Nutrition Policy, an important multisectoral policy emphasizing the importance of nutrition to families and the country.

The UN Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition, a partnership between FAO (current chair), WFP, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, ministries, IFIs and INGOs, supported this policy development in order to accelerate progress towards the MDG target to reduce child malnutrition.

In addition, Lao PDR is one of two countries selected by the 'REACH: ending child hunger and undernutrition' initiative for a 1-year pilot. Initiated by FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, REACH works across sectors, supporting the Government in scaling-up nutrition-related activities.

Partners in the Working Group have pledged to continue working together to develop a National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) and National Action Plan on Nutrition (NPAN).



Joint UN Sustainable Livelihoods Programme

With the United Nations globally promoting system-wide coherence, the UN Country Team in Lao PDR is developing integrated programmes. UN agencies share experience and expertise to reach common development goals for sustainable livelihoods through the Joint United Nations Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (JSLP).

The JSLP concentrates on upland areas of Northern Laos, in particular Oudomxay, one of the poorest provinces in the country which faces considerable environmental and livelihoods challenges. JSLP is partnered by the International NGO German Agro Action/Deutsche Welthungerhilfe

The Programme brings together the expertise of many partners with one vision: making sure that people, especially the most vulnerable, improve their livelihoods sustainably, according to their priorities through greater access to resources and quality services.

Human Trafficking in Lao PDR: Challenges, Lessons Learnt and Responses

UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region

Movement of people within countries and across national borders is not new. For the Lao PDR, however, with increasingly open borders and larger flows of goods, the present scale of movement is unprecedented. Labour migration, though it can benefit individuals and society at large, is also fraught with risks. The combination of informal or illegal migration, inadequate interventions to prevent human trafficking and a demand for unskilled work provides major opportunities for traffickers to exploit a vulnerable pool of migrants.

The UN in the Lao PDR, through UNIAP and other agencies, plays a key role in addressing the issues around human trafficking, in close collaboration with Government and other partners.

Human trafficking is now a major concern in Lao PDR and the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) which, during the last decade, the Lao Government, UN agencies and INGOs have implemented numerous interventions to combat. The UN plays a key role in addressing the issues in close collaboration with government counterparts and other partners. For instance, UNICEF and ILO/IPEC-TICW implement projects at community level aimed at safe migration and the creation of alternative livelihoods. This is done through different forms of awareness raising, community networks and microfinance. UNESCO has long experience working with ethnic minority groups and UNIFEM is well placed to advocate for the implementation of CEDAW and the rights of women migrant workers.

In addition to prevention, prosecution and protection are two other key areas in counter-trafficking in order to bring perpetrators to court and to uphold the rights and bring justice to those trafficked. UNODC works to strengthen both the legal framework and the capacity of law enforcement officials. UNICEF focus on protecting children's rights and has been instrumental in the development of a Children's Law (2006) and the National Plan of Action Against Commercial

and Sexual Exploitation against Children (2007). To facilitate a stronger and more coordinated response in the GMS including Lao PDR, UNIAP was established in 2000. An inter-agency project, UNIAP coordinates the policy and operational response to human trafficking in close collaboration with its main stakeholders. As a Secretariat to the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT), UNIAP also facilitates inter-agency collaboration to support the Lao Government in its counter-trafficking work.

There have been several lessons learnt during the last decade of work on human trafficking in Lao PDR and in the GMS. One major lesson is that preventing migration is not only costly, but also potentially counterproductive and harmful, as more human trafficking may well result if more people have to rely on unknown or unreliable middlemen and networks to cross the border. Another lesson learnt is that forced labour is far more prevalent than previously thought. Human trafficking into sexual exploitation is a major issue, but so is trafficking into situations such as factory work, plantations or the fishing industry. Human trafficking is a tragic violation of human rights that affects women, children and men from Lao PDR, and counter-trafficking responses should be sensitive to all vulnerable groups.

There are undoubtedly more lessons to be learnt. With rapid developments and shifting migration and human trafficking patterns, there is a pressing need for more research, impact-assessments, joint cooperation and alignment of priorities in the sector.

Human trafficking is often described as "a fall-out from irregular migration", yet migration and human trafficking are not isolated phenomena. Both must be understood, not only within the localised context but as part of larger social, economic and cultural dimensions of a dynamic society.

Vulnerability to human trafficking is often linked to all these dimensions, with poverty and economic disparities acting as both push and pull factors.



Noi's story



Savannakhet, June 2008: Looking back, Noi wonders how she could have been so naïve. It had been the school holidays, and a woman named Su came to her family farm outside Savannakhet.

Su said she could help Noi get a job in Thailand, where just by working as a waitress she could earn much more than in Laos.

"I was just sixteen," recalls Noi. "I trusted her."

Noi's father told her "No." "I'd heard stories about what happened to Lao girls in Thailand. But Noi didn't believe me."

That night Noi crept out of the house and was taken across the Mekong river with two other village girls. The three girls were passed through the hands of many brokers – each taking a cut.

Noi was taken to a bar in the Thai city of Saraburi, where she was told the only way she could earn money was by sleeping with customers. She refused. "I told her I wouldn't, and I began thinking about how to escape."

She managed to phone her family, who tracked down the broker, Su, and through her, found out where his daughter was being held. He phoned the bar in Saraburi and threatened to tell the police if his daughter wasn't released. Sensing trouble, the bar owner sent Noi back to the broker who had brought her, and she was discovered when police raided the Thai broker's house.

Noi was passed into the hands of the Kredtrakarn centre in Bangkok, which provides protection and assistance to children below 18 through occupational development, psychosocial rehabilitation and medical treatment. She was then sent back to Laos under the auspices of Afesip, a UNICEF-supported NGO working on child trafficking issues.

To help Noi make a fresh start, Afesip sent her to be trained as a beautician; hopefully, her new skills will provide her with enough income to make a living, and avoid falling prey to the traffickers again.

Whatever her future, Noi says that's a trap she will never fall into again. "Not if they paid me thousands of dollars," she says with a confident smile.

The identity of the people in these images and this story has been protected; the story is factual.

Photos: UNICEF Lao PDR/Holmes

This collective learning and concerted action will make a lasting impact on the human trafficking situation in Lao PDR and beyond, with more lessons to be learnt on the way. These are likely to include how to create truly safe channels for migration and how human trafficking prevention links with long-term development.

On 21 December 2008 the Lao Youth Union, supported by UN agencies, INGOs and NGOs marked International Counter-Trafficking Day with a Fun Run from Patouxay to the Presidential Palace in central Vientiane.

For more information contact UNIAP in the Lao PDR.
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United Nations

Working in Lao PDR

The United Nations in the Lao PDR

Laos joined the United Nations in 1955, with the first UN agency office established in Vientiane in 1957.

The United Nations Country Team Commitment to the Lao PDR

The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People's Democratic Republic 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.

UN agencies collaborate in Sector Working Groups in order to deliver the most effective support to the Government in the areas of Health, Education, Poverty Reduction, Governance and HIV and AIDS, along with the cross-cutting issues of Human Trafficking, Gender and Statistical Indicators.

United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Lao PDR (2007-2011)

UN Country Team in the Lao PDR

Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator

Resident UN Agencies

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
UNAIDS	Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Non-Resident UN Agencies

ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNCRD	United Nations Centre for Regional Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees



"We face two great crises: climate change and the global economy. But these crises present us with an opportunity — an opportunity to address both challenges simultaneously. Managing the global financial crisis requires a massive global stimulus. A big part of that spending should be investment — an investment in a green future that creates millions of green jobs and green growth. We need a Green New Deal."

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon, December 2008

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