



Ambassador Daniel A. Clune (left) and Mr Phoukhieo Chanthasomboune shake hands to conclude the ceremony

The US has announced it will be increasing grant aid to assist with unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Laos from US\$9 million per year to US\$12 million per year.

The US Ambassador to Laos Mr Daniel A. Clune and Director of the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) Mr Phoukhieo Chanthasomboune attended a ceremony at the NRA office in Vientiane on Friday to announce the increase to the local media.

The US began cooperating with Laos in order to address the issues and consequences of UXO in 1993 through providing funding to UXO victims. The US government expanded its assistance programme in 1996 to involve UXO clearance and building awareness of the dangers and risks involved.

Since the beginning of the US' assistance in this programme until now, funding has reached around US\$70 million with a total of US\$9 million being provided per year, as seen in 2012 and 2013.

Laos is the most UXO affected country in the world in terms of ordnances per citizen with around 80 million cluster bombs contaminating the nation.

As seen in past years, the US funding will be provided in cooperation with the NRA, UXO-Lao, international and local organisations and other humanitarian clearance operators.

The funding will also help support an evidence-based survey.

The funds provided for UXO clearance will focus on provinces which have been seriously impacted by cluster munitions. Victim's assistance will also be provided to survivors of UXO accidents and their families, and aid will also support capacity development of national institutions.

The funding will also help strengthen first aid and emergency response at key health facilities in heavily impacted provinces.

Risk awareness funding, on the other hand, will focus on educating Lao citizens on the dangers of UXO, especially children.

Speaking at the ceremony, Ambassador Clune praised the assistance and cooperation of many countries, donors and development partners for their hard work.

He also said clearance operators have ensured that the casualties from the cluster bombs have decreased in recent years from an average of around 300 per year to 41 in the past year.

However, the ambassador pointed out that 41 casualties is still a high number.

Mr Phoukhieo said despite the Lao government and international community making joint efforts to clear UXO since 1990, the clearance has only reached 2 percent of the contaminated areas.

He said UXO remains a danger to the Lao people and hurdle in their national development.

Mr Phoukhieo, who represented the Lao government, welcomed the assistance from the international community, including the US which he said was the top donor towards assisting with UXO in Laos.