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Minutes

The 2nd Sector Working Group Meeting in 2023

Date: 7th December 2023, 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Vientiane

I. INTRODUCTION.

On 7 December 2023, the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Embassy of the United States to Lao PDR organized the second Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Sector Working Group (SWG) Meeting for 2023 at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Vientiane Capital. The meeting was attended by members of the NRA Board, development partners, representatives from line ministries of the Lao government, NRA provincial authorities, UXO clearance operators, and staff from the NRA Headquarters office in Vientiane. A total of 70 participants attended the SWG.

The SWG was chaired by **H.E. Phoxay KHAYKHAMPHITHOUNE, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs**, and co-chaired by **Mrs. Martine Thérér, Resident Representative, UNDP**, and **H.E. Michelle Y. Outlaw, Chargée d’Affaires, U.S. Embassy**.

II. WELCOME AND OPENING SESSION.

1. **H.E. Phoxay KHAYKHAMPHITHOUNE, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.**

- Welcomed the meeting delegates and officially opened the meeting.
- He stated that this meeting is crucial to discuss openly with donor countries, international organizations, UXO operators and other related sectors to optimise the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UXO work.
- He gave a brief report on the transition of UXO work from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MoLSW) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on 4 September 2023
- He reported that over the past year, the NRA has focused on the implementation of their role continuously to achieve the objectives set out in the National Strategic Plan, Safe Path Forward III - 2021-2030.
- He was pleased to report that the UXO work is now integrated across various sectors, including education, sports, information, culture, tourism, public health and other related sectors. This integration is largely attributed to the NRA’s comprehensive guidance and execution of activities at all levels. Key areas such as Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE), Victim Assistance (VA), survey-clearance operations and demolition procedures are being meticulously managed. These efforts are tailored to meet specific objectives at each stage of economic-

social development, emphasizing a humanitarian approach in the management of UXO operations.

- Along with the success, he also noted that there are still a few challenges that require collaborative efforts to firmly maintain the coordination and collaboration with all parties. He reiterated that UXO work is the priority of the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) and MoFA will enhance the continuous collaboration with all related parties at national and international levels to continually address UXO issue in effective and efficient manner and alignment with local needs. He encouraged all distinguished guests to share their comments in the meeting to improve the UXO work collaboratively.

2. H.E. Michelle Y. Outlaw, Chargée d’Affaires, US Embassy

- She expressed her sincere thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for holding this meeting. This is the first time that she has co-chaired the meeting.
- The United States is proud to be a strong partner and supporter of the Lao PDR to achieve the 18th Sustainable Development Goal to eliminate UXO as a barrier to national development by 2030.
- The United States is proud to be the largest donor country to the UXO sector in the Lao PDR, having provided more than 355 million US dollars since 1995.
- In addition, she also mentioned her participation in the field visit of UXO Lao last month in Xiengkhouang province.
- For the 40 new Clearance teams in 5 provinces in the south that were announced at the meeting of the UXO sector in June, it is currently being implemented, all additional teams are now deployed. Now there are 202 Clearance teams funded by the United States of America.
- Along with this success, we also received the news that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has approved the Phase III project of the Halo-Trust. Of this, there is a budget of roughly 40 million US dollars for the implementation of operations in Savannakhet province until April 2025.
- Thanks to the government of the United States expanding the clearance capacity in the UXO Sector. Currently, the United States can provide new training for the senior EOD technicians. The NRA and the Tetra Tech Organization have discussed the hiring of a foreign expert to train senior explosive ordnance disposal technicians next year.
- In addition, the "Train-the-Trainer" program will be held in March 2024 in Vietnam and it is a good opportunity for participants from the Lao PDR to be observers and learn how to apply lessons to Unit 58 in the future.

III. PRESENTATIONS.

1. **Mr. Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, the Director of the NRA**, reported on the Sectoral achievement in 2023, along with challenges and opportunities in implementing UXO work in Lao PDR. His report included submission of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) Article 4 extension, responses on the Knowledge Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey and Post Clearance Impact Assessment (PCIA) recommendations and completion of most of trainings for 13 new

teams of Unit 58. He also mentioned about coordination with concerned sectors to implement government decree No.210/govt. Additionally, he discussed NRA's participation in various events like CCM and regional workshops, including for the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) cooperation: participation in the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) workshop. His presentation highlighted South-South Cooperation with an emphasis on Quality Management and Information Management exchanges between Lao PDR and Cambodia. Further, the presentation also highlighted progress in areas of EORE, VA, survey and clearance and management of operations.

2. Ms. Moukdavanh Sisoulith, Deputy Director of International Organization (IO) Department, detailed on hand-over of the supervision of the UXO Sector, including the chairmanship of the UXO SWG meeting, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs including plans to improve the UXO work in the future. To improve the functioning of the UXO SWG, she confirmed that biannual meetings will continue. However, there will be a change in the chairperson for mid-year meeting, with the Head of the Department of International Organization taking charge, emphasizing need for technical discussions for practical implementation and timely resolution of UXO-related challenges at various stages.

For the technical meetings (Technical Working Group, TWG), it was proposed to have an additional technical working group on management and coordination at the level of the heads of operational organization. Another key change for the SWG and TWG meetings was that the SWG will task the TWG meetings to research, discuss, and analyze the problems, and propose solutions or escalate the various issues to the SWG meeting to be considered at the next stage to move them forward. Ideas for rotating co-chairs for the SWG and TWGs were proposed and welcomed by the stakeholders.

IV. COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION FOLLOWING PRESENTATIONS

- **Mr. Rupert Leighton, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP** asked for a clarification regarding the difference between the First and Second SWG to Ms. Moukdavanh Sisoulith where the first SWG of the year was proposed to be less formal and the second SWG to be more formal. Ms. Moudavanh responded that the first SWG of the year should be a platform for discussion, to promote the efficiency and transparency of the Lao PDR UXO/Mine Action and to work to increase funding opportunities through a constructive discussion and collective responsibility. The second meeting of the year should focus on the end of year reporting against strategic targets
- **Ms. Minyoung Kim, UXO Portfolio Manager/Head of UXO Unit, UNDP** remarked that she is pleased to see the positive progress on the victim assistance with more than 3,000 people received support this year and reiterated to continue to support victim assistance projects. She informed that the UNDP would conduct a study on VA Situation Analysis in 2024 to understand the overall VA situation and identify the gaps for support.
- **Mr. Cashel Gleeson, Deputy head of mission, Embassy of the United Kingdom,** welcomed the new guidance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a positive step,

and mentioned that the UK has a good relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He noted that the UK has been contributing to the preparation of the ASEAN summit next year. In the past seven years, the UK Government has provided more than 20 million dollars to support the UXO work through HALO and MAG. These projects will continue until May 2025.

- **Ms. Rebecca Derry, Country Director of World Education**, emphasized their dedication to implementing EORE and VA. She highlighted the organization's strong relationship with the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following announcement of changes in working group mechanisms, she expressed her excitement/agreement at having the Co-Chair's involved and committed to collaborate closely, to ensure that the working group's specific tasks are completed on time.
- **Representative from Ministry of Planning and Investment** noted that the purpose of today's presentation was to highlight accomplishments of UXO related activities. The representative mentioned that his ministry will work closely with the secretariat of the SWG meeting to coordinate implementation in the next phase. The representative confirmed ongoing coordination with SWG meeting's secretariat, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- **Mr. Olivier Bauduin, UXO Program Advisor, US Embassy** noted that in 2023 more land was cleared than in 2022 because there are more teams and he thinks that in 2024, there will be even more clearance operations in the provinces with the additional clearance teams working for the full year. UXO Lao will work again in nine provinces instead of five, and Unit 58 have increased the number of teams to twenty. He welcomed MoFA proposition to have a fifth Technical Working Group to improve policy and coordination, where innovation should also be discussed. In addition, he proposed that the UXO Sector Working Group tasks the NRA Office and the Technical Working Groups to progress on the review of the National Standards. Building on the Vang Vieng workshop in September 2023, when a process was discussed on how to review and update the National Standards. The NRA should provide an update on the progress at the next Sector Working Group meeting in 2024.
- **Mr. Simon Rea, Tetra Tech**, expressed hope that the clearance of 10,000 ha per year can be achieved with continuous US support to operations in Luang Prabang and Huaphan provinces in 2024.
- **Mr. Rupert Leighton, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP** suggested that for the target of 10,000 ha, we should consider the use of new and innovative techniques and methods to achieve the national clearance target of 10,000 ha.
- **Mr. Thippasone Soukhathammavong, Deputy Director of Planning and International Cooperation, MoLSW**, commented on the importance of the UXO works to meet SPF III targets and the 18th Sustainable Development Goal. He also highlighted the challenges in collecting data for reporting indicators of SDG18, especially set in target indicator 18.2 i.e., By 2030, ensure residual UXO activities undertaken and all known UXO contamination in high-priority areas and all villages defined as 'poor' cleared.
- **Mr. Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat, the Director of the NRA**, emphasized that the National Prioritization Plan on UXO work needs to be closely aligned with

priority plans with relevant sectors and should be clearly detailed to facilitate the determination of priorities in UXO works.

V. WRAP UP AND CLOSING REMARKS

1. Mrs. Martine Thérér, Resident Representative, UNDP.

- She expressed her gratitude to the participants for their insights and constructive suggestions and extended her best wishes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the successful transfer of the NRA under the Ministry's authority. She encouraged all stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and the exchange of ideas in the UXO sector as called on by the Vice Minister of MoFA. She also expressed hope that development partners and I/NGOs will continue to play an important role in the implementation of the UXO work to support the achievement the government's goals for Survey-Clearance, EORE and Victim Assistance and various operational processes.
- She encouraged stakeholders to embrace innovation and boldness in their approaches to achieve better outcomes, and learn new ways to improve the way UXO sector operates.
- The UNDP Representative stated that with Lao PDR set to host the ASEAN summit next year, the UNDP is prepared to assist the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This support aims to establish Lao PDR as a leading nation in the sector and to promote the universalization of the CCM, recognizing Lao PDR as the country most affected by UXO globally.
- The UNDP Representative emphasized the need to finalize the review of the national standards and the national priority plan, which are crucial in accelerating the achievement of shared objectives and reiterated this year's motto for the international Mine Awareness Day, 'UXO/Mine Action Cannot Wait.' She reminded all the participants that UXO work should be approached with both urgency and commitment.

2. H.E. Phoxay KHAYKHAMPHITHOUNE, Vice Minister of Foreign Affair

- He expressed his gratitude to all participants in this meeting for sharing comments to improve the UXO sector in the future.
- Since the UXO work is considered an important task of the government, he urged for improvement of the NRA and to strengthen the system of coordination, management, and operations that will be efficient and effective and measurable.
- For the regulation of the UXO work, he stated that the Ministry will continue to follow the government decree No. 210/gv, dated July 29, 2022, but there will only be adjustments to article 10 and the structure of the NRA. For technical work, it will continue to follow the said legislation, the coordination mechanism maintained for coordination through the NRA office to report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- At the macro-level, after the completion of the revision of the decree in Article 10, he said that there will be a full meeting of the NRA Board chaired by Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs to endorse the vision, work plan and other

related documents of the NRA for issuance of guidelines or manuals which will be crucial for the implementation of the UXO work. They will include details of how to coordinate and process the document so that all relevant parties can implement it more conveniently and uniformly.

- He stated that transitioning the work of the NRA to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs required the office to improve the meeting mechanism of the Sector Working Group meeting. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains committed to take the feedback from the meeting to improve and share to the Ministry of Planning and Investment to adjust the process for the sake of consistency.
- Regarding the work that will continue to be discussed in the technical meeting on various issues, NRA office will share the outcomes of the meeting to be discussed in the technical meetings, for the relevant parties to prepare to participate in the discussion in the framework of the Technical Working Group following which it will then report the results to the Sector Working Group for its consideration.

H.E. Phoxay KHAYKHAMPHITHOUNE, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affair



Signature: _____, Date: _____
Phoxay KHAYKHAMPHITHOUNE

H.E. Michelle Y. Outlaw, Chargée d’Affaires, US Embassy

Signature: Michelle Y. Outlaw, Date: Jan. 31, 2024

Mrs. Martine Thérér, Resident Representative, UNDP



Signature: M. Thérér, Date: 19/1/2024