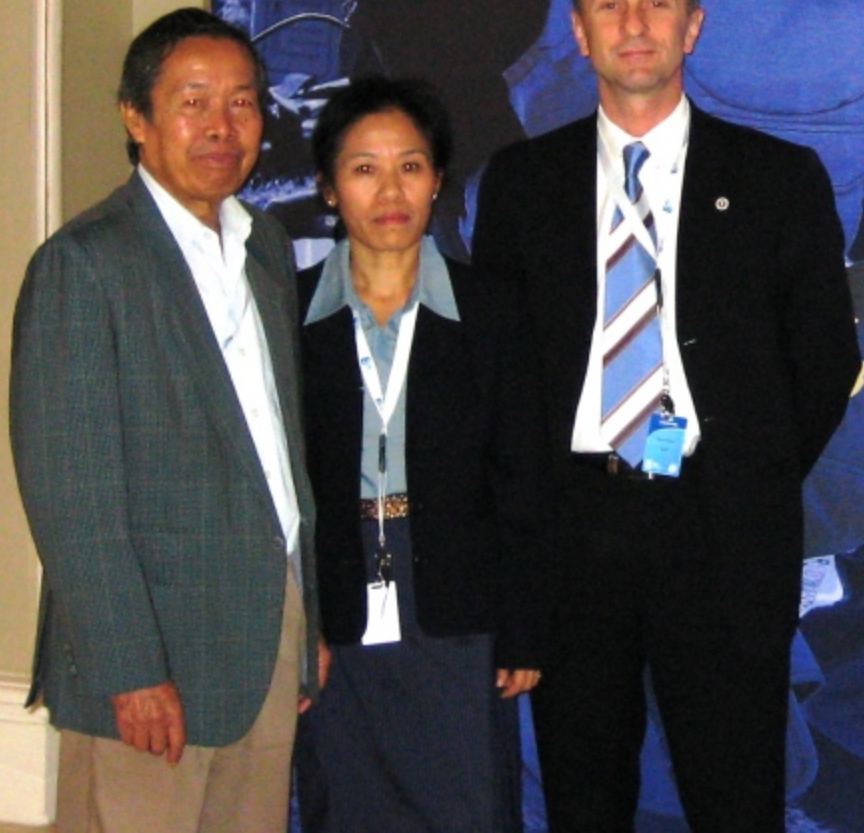


8th Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention



Safeguarding

LIFE

Statement by Dr. Maligna SAIGNAVONGS
Director of the National Regulatory Authority (NRA)
For
UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR

On the Universalisation of the Ottawa Convention, at the 8th MSP,
Dead Sea, Jordan, 18 November 2007.

Your Royal Highness,

On behalf of the Lao Delegation, I would like to join the previous speakers in congratulating you for your unanimous election as President of this 8th Meeting of States Parties of the Ottawa Convention and to thank the Jordan Government for hosting this important event and for the warm hospitality extended to us.

The Jordan and the Lao peoples have both suffered from war in the past; and as far as the Lao people is concerned, 30 years after the ceasefire, it continues to bear the undesirable effects of the war.

Your Highness,

As you may have heard, Laos has the un-enviable distinction of being the most heavily bombed country in the world. So, it is more affected by UXO, particularly by Cluster munitions than by landmines. Although Laos is not yet a party to the Ottawa Convention, it has no objection against the provisions of the Convention. Most of the works done or ongoing by the Lao Government so far with its limited resources, in terms of Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Victim Assistance, are consistent with the provisions of the Convention and IMAS. Laos is not a producer of anti-personnel landmines and has no major difficulties with the implementation of the general obligations of the Convention.

The main concern and the hesitation of the Lao Government to accede to the Convention reside in the implementation of Article 5.

During 30 years of civil war, the warring factions had laid down anti-personnel landmines to protect their respective strongholds. According to Experts, there were about 1,000 minefields in the country.

Between 1964 and 1973, Laos was subjected to heavy aerial bombings. More than 580,000 bombing missions were carried out over the country dropping about 4 million tons of bombs, including more than 270 million Cluster sub-munitions bomblets, known as "*Bombies*" in the country. More than 87,000 sq km, or 1/3 of the country land area are contaminated by UXO. So, above the minefields, there are many, many UXO.

Since there are no records of the mined areas, it would be difficult to locate them. Our concern is to be not able to comply with the 10 years deadline. Of course, there is

possibility for extension of the deadline. But given the large scale contamination of the country, how many extensions will the States Parties agree to grant to Lao PDR?

Another point is that, once the Convention enters into force for Lao PDR, the latter will have to devote all efforts to locate, mark and destroy anti-personnel landmines in known or suspected mined areas, and to abandon or stop UXO clearance activities. If this is the case, it will be difficult for the Lao Government to endorse this concept or principle, because actually, most of the accidents are caused by UXO.

Your Highness,

This is the concern of the Lao Government I wish to share with the States Parties and to seek advices from them.

Your Highness,

Before concluding, I would like to share with you the following information: during the past years, Lao PDR did not participate to the voting of the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Universalisation of the Ottawa Convention. For the next voting, Lao PDR will support the Resolution.

I wish the 8th Meeting of the States Parties a great success.

Thank you