

Japan supports UXO clearance in Xieng Khuang

Times Reporters

The Japanese government has provided grant assistance worth more than 5 billion kip (US\$598,330) for the cluster submunition machine clearance project in Xieng Khuang province.

A signing ceremony for the project was held on Friday in Vientiane between the Japanese Ambassador to Laos, Mr Takeshi Hikihara, and Country Director of the Japan Mine Action Service, a Japanese non-profit organisation, Mr Makoto Saijo.

The ceremony was witnessed by Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Dr Khampheng Xaysompheng, Governor of Xieng Khuang province Mr Bountonh Chanthaphone, and representatives of line ministries.

Dr Khampheng said the project was very important because unexploded ordnance (UXO) remained a major obstacle to economic development in Laos, especially in rural areas.

He thanked the Japanese government for their assistance and hoped it would continue into the future.

According to the Japanese Embassy, the project is in its third year and aims to contribute to securing a safe living environment and promote rural development in Xieng Khuang province through the removal of UXO using the cluster submunition



Dr Khampheng Xaysompheng (centre) poses with Mr Takeshi Hikihara and other officials after the project signing ceremony on Friday.

clearance machine.

This machine can cut bush around a bomb site and dispose of cluster submunitions, which enables teams to reduce operation time and improve safety. It is the first time in the world that the process of UXO clearance has been fully mechanised.

The Japan Mine Action Service received material support such as free use of the machine from Komatsu Ltd., the Japanese construction equipment manufacturer. It is hoped the project will help UXO-clearance operations in Laos in the medium and longer term.

The Japan Mine Action Service has been actively engaged in UXO clearance across Laos for a long time, in Xieng Khuang, Saravan, Attapeu, and Champassak provinces as well as in Vientiane. Japan is fully

aware of the importance of UXO issues and has placed particular emphasis on UXO-clearance operations by funding them, providing equipment such as detectors and brush cutters, as well as technical assistance and capacity building activities.

Japan has also been engaged in assistance programmes in the field of UXO-related risk education and medical treatment of UXO victims.

During the Second Indochina War (1964-1975) more than two million tonnes of explosive ordnance were dropped on Laos. Their presence continues to hinder socio-economic development by preventing safe access to agricultural land and increasing the costs of development projects due to the expensive and time-consuming process of UXO clearance.