

## United States expands assistance for UXO clearance

The United States has provided more assistance for the clearance of unexploded ordnance in Laos, to prevent local residents being injured, disabled or killed. The US government provided vehicles and field equipment worth US\$1.25 million to the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme. Some 15 vehicles, 150 UXO detectors and other equipment will be given to UXO clearance teams in the southern provinces of Khammuan, Savannakhet and Attapeu.



The supplies were handed over at a ceremony held on Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, attended by US Ambassador to Laos, Ms Rena Bitter; Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Dr. Khamkeo Sanbounkhounxay; Deputy-Director of National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR (NRA), Mr. Bounpheng Sisawath; Director of UXO Lao, Mr. Thipphasone Soukhathammavong and some UXO related counterparts.



Ambassador Bitter said the programme of support for the clearance of contaminated land reflects the close partnership between the United States and the government and people of Laos. Assistance has been provided for over two decades to address war legacy issues. “This contribution to the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme is part of the United States’ commitment of US\$90 million over three years to fund a national cluster munitions survey, in addition to the ongoing clearance of UXO,” she added.

Dr Khamkeo said “The vehicles and field equipment worth US\$1.25 million will assist 15 UXO clearance teams to continue to clear land that still harbours unexploded ordnance in Khammuan, Savannakhet and Attapeu provinces.” The United States’ assistance will enable the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme to work more effectively, while also boosting rural development and poverty eradication. Unexploded ordnance continues to affect Laos. Over the years,



thousands of people have been killed or injured, usually rural people and their children, Dr Khamkeo said.



The Lao government and its development partners have continued to cooperate to remove UXO in high-risk areas. The clearance of unexploded ordnance is one activity that will help Laos to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Since 1990, the US government has granted more than US\$135 million for UXO clearance and surveys, to help the victims of UXO-related accidents, and provide information about the risks of unexploded ordnance, Dr Khamkeo said. The US government has been assisting the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme since 1990. It has put more than US\$25 million into efforts to reduce the number of people injured and killed in UXO-related accidents and to open up land for agricultural production and development projects, which will help to alleviate poverty. According to the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme, over 20 years of the programme's implementation, more than 380 square kilometres of land have been cleared for safe

use, enabling schools, water supplies and roads to be built. More than 1,480,000 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed from 1996-2016. In 2016 a total of 67,166 UXO items were destroyed by the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme's clearance operations.

