

Keynote address by Mme. Onchanh Thammavong, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Vice Chairperson in charge of NRA, at the National Strategic Plan Review Meeting, held at the Lao Plaza on 20-21 March 2009

- The Resident Representative of the UNDP,
- Representatives of International Organizations,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

As Vice Chairperson in charge of the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) in Lao PDR, I am very delighted to attend this National Strategic Plan Review Meeting, which will review and improve the 2003-2013 National Strategic Plan, "The Safe Path Forward", for addressing UXO issues in Lao PDR.

This is the first time that we come together to assess the result of the implementation of the said Strategic Plan that has been carried out in the past six years. At this venue, we will discuss and share views, and try to identify areas which might need revision for our situation. In this regard, it is crucial for us to align our activities with the Sixth Five Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010), and the National Strategic Plan for Poverty Eradication by 2020. This is an overall policy of the government aiming at leading the country out of a state of underdevelopment. In this endeavour, different sectors are required to formulate detailed plans to be applied according to their role and jurisdiction.

Distinguished participants,

The intention behind this meeting is to assess the situation, and identify and rectify shortcomings. In doing so, it will help to further enhance our strengths, and to create more favourable conditions for the management and implementation of the Strategic Plan. The approach will allow us to achieve the Government's goals as stipulated in the Poverty Alleviation Plan. We must act together and be proactive in creating these positive conditions for developing infrastructure in different areas. To achieve this goal, UXO clearance tasks cannot be overlooked. The UXO problem is indeed a serious obstacle for the national economic development. Because of UXO contamination, our economic growth is slow, and as we all know well, Lao PDR is an underdeveloped country. Our Government lacks funds for UXO clearance. We need to seek financial help from outside.

However, a big challenge in soliciting financial support at the moment is the current financial crisis that the world economies are facing. But the Government feels strongly that it needs to improve the national strategic plan for addressing UXO issues in order to help achieve the numerous goals set that would allow the country to free itself from the state of underdevelopment in the new millennium. To do this successfully, continued hard work for many years to come is needed.

As participants of this consequential meeting, I would like to make an earnest request to you to make a physical and mental contribution while discussing and sharing lessons that would make this meeting successful.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Lao PDR, I would like to express our high appreciation to UNDP and other international organizations for their strong support in many ways to our country.

Thank you for your attention!