March 16, 2019

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

Thank you for efforts to ensure that adequate attention is placed on U.S. efforts to clean up unexploded ordnance on foreign soil. As you craft the Fiscal Year 2020 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, we respectfully request you include not less than $30 million for Laos demining within the Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) section of the Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR).

In one of the most enduring, yet least well-known, legacies of the Vietnam War, unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the nine-year U.S. bombing campaign over Laos is still endangering villagers as they go about their daily lives. Between 1964 and 1973, more than 2 million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos – more than was dropped on Germany and Japan combined during the Second World War. The U.S. flew in excess of 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, the equivalent of one bombing mission every 8 minutes around the clock for nine years. Less than one percent of the estimated 80 million leftover bombs in Laos have been cleared, resulting in over 20,000 casualties since the war ended in 1975.

On a per capita basis, Laos is the most heavily bombed country in history.

UXO in Laos continues to impede development in one of the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific. The UN Development Program has reported that “UXO/mine action is the absolute pre-condition for the socio-economic development of Lao[s],” and that because of UXO “economic opportunities in tourism, hydroelectric power, mining, forestry and many other areas of activity considered main engines of growth for Laos are restricted, complicated, and made more expensive.” Development and poverty reduction efforts are hindered by the tens of millions of unexploded cluster bomblets littering forests, rice fields, villages, school grounds, roads, and other populated areas.

This dark chapter in history continues to threaten the lives and livelihood of the Laotian people, many of whom were born two generations after the war ended. Thanks to strong Congressional support in Fiscal Year 2019, demining operations in Laos were funded at $30 million for the third consecutive year. With this funding, the first-ever countrywide survey of UXO contamination is now well underway,
which has resulted in the removal of more than 600 UXO items per day. Our request to include the $30 million for CWD in Laos ensures that the significant progress made with this funding is sustained.

Ensuring that Laos receives the $30 million commitment for FY 2020 sends a strong message to the world that the U.S. delivers on its promises. As you know, China continues to expand its influence throughout Southeast Asia, and therefore it’s critical that we enhance, not hinder, the role of the U.S. in the region. We cannot afford to jeopardize our leadership role by failing to deliver on our promises.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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Sean P. Duffy
Member of Congress

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Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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