



U.S. Funding and the Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Sector in Laos

Background

Laos is the most heavily bombed country in history, on a per capita basis. During the Vietnam War-era, the U.S. dropped over 270 million cluster bomblets on Laos. More bombs were dropped on Laos than in all of Europe during WWII. Today, an estimated 80 million unexploded cluster bomblets litter forests, rice fields, villages, school grounds, roads and other populated areas— hindering development and poverty reduction efforts. Over 20,000 people have been injured or killed since the bombing ended. Due to clearance operations and mines risk education, casualties have dropped from over 300 a year to an average of 50 per year, 40% of whom are children.

Recent Developments

The U.S. Congress has increased aid to the UXO sector in Laos from \$3 million in 2008 to \$30 million in 2017. Congress has specifically recognized the responsibility of the U.S. to prioritize the “clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in areas where such ordnance was caused by the United States,” such as Laos. This investment also recognizes the improved relations between the U.S. and the Lao PDR, a critical partner in ASEAN and the Asia Pacific. In 2016, as part of President Obama’s historic trip to Laos, the U.S. pledged \$90 million to Laos for the UXO sector over 3 years. This critical funding will be used for ongoing clearance, victim assistance and a detailed country-wide survey, which will provide clearance operators with a much needed assessment of the scale and cost of the clearance task that remains. The commitment provides the U.S. a unique opportunity to create a new legacy of peace and stability in a region once associated with the legacies of war and show its strength, credibility and presence in the region.

Status of U.S. \$90 million Pledge

The first two installments of the \$90 million pledge, totaling \$60 million, were obligated in 2016 and 2017 and are being administered by the Department of State to a dozen groups, mainly U.S.-based non-governmental groups working in Laos. The last \$30 million of the pledge, part of the FY18 budget process, is threatened to be cut significantly. The White House budget proposal, if enacted, would slash UXO funding for Laos to \$10 million from \$30 million, or a 65 percent cut.

Policy Recommendations

Legacies strongly recommends the appropriation of funds already pledged— \$90 million total and \$30 million for FY18— as a way to provide for the security and safety of Lao villagers and advance the credibility of U.S. commitments in the region. This first-ever multi-year commitment of U.S. funds for the UXO sector in Laos ensures a strong U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, an area of growing markets and economic vitality important for long-term U.S. trade interests. This assistance will help the U.S. to create a new legacy of peace and stability in a region once associated with the sad burden of war.

Legacies of War (“Legacies”) is the only U.S. based organization dedicated to raising awareness about the continuing devastation that has resulted from the Vietnam War-era bombing of Laos.