



PRESS RELEASE

President Obama Announces Historic Increase in Funding for Removal of Unexploded Ordnance from Laos

September 6, 2016 (Vientiane, Laos) – U.S. President Barack Obama today announced a substantial increase in funding for the removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO) from Laos, as part of his visit to Laos, the first-ever visit to Laos by a U.S. president. The President raised funding levels to \$30 million a year over 3 years, for a total of \$90 million. Since its founding in 2004, Legacies of War has encouraged the U.S. government to increase its funding for the UXO sector in Laos, resulting in a rise from just \$3 million in 2008 to nearly \$20 million in 2016. All of these funds go directly to operations on the ground in Laos, including survey, clearance, risk education and services for victims.

“Legacies of War is thrilled by the President’s announcement and is deeply grateful to the countless supporters and institutional partners that have enabled the organization to carry out its crucial education and advocacy work,” said Channapha Khamvongsa, who was acknowledged by President Obama for her strong advocacy role. She continued, “but the President’s announcement of unprecedented levels of support for the UXO sector in Laos does not signal an end to our work. Clearance teams are not yet working in all areas of the country and victim assistance, particularly at the district and village level, is still at a very basic level. The work goes on.”

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, a long-term champion of assistance to war victims, hailed the President’s announcement. “During more than four decades since the end of the Vietnam War,” said Senator Leahy, “thousands of innocent Laotians have been maimed and killed by millions of U.S. cluster munitions and other unexploded bombs. Over many years, I included funds to help remove them, but President Obama’s announcement today is historic. For the first time, an American president has publicly recognized that we have a responsibility to do more to end this tragic legacy, by increasing funding to support a national survey and clearance programs, assistance for victims, and risk education. I will do everything I can to ensure that the Congress does its part.”

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Air Force flew 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, dropping more than 270 million cluster munitions. Tens of millions of these bombs failed to explode, causing more than 20,000 casualties in Laos since the war’s end.

Legacies of War Advisory Board Chair Titus Peachey highlighted the significance of the President’s remarks. “In the early years after the war, I made many visits to Lao villages and listened to the quiet grief-laden voices of villagers as they talked about the trauma of war and the fresh wounds inflicted by the U.S. bombs still buried in their fields. To have this pain acknowledged publicly by the U.S. President on Lao soil was important to me as a U.S. citizen. Remembering the harm of the war is an important step in charting a new course, toward a legacy of peace, safety and healing.”

U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (D-MN) also commended President Obama for his support for UXO clean-up in Laos. “The U.S. has a moral obligation to clean up the American-made bombs that continue to threaten the lives of the Lao people. I will continue to advocate in Congress for increased and sustained funding for UXO clean-up.”



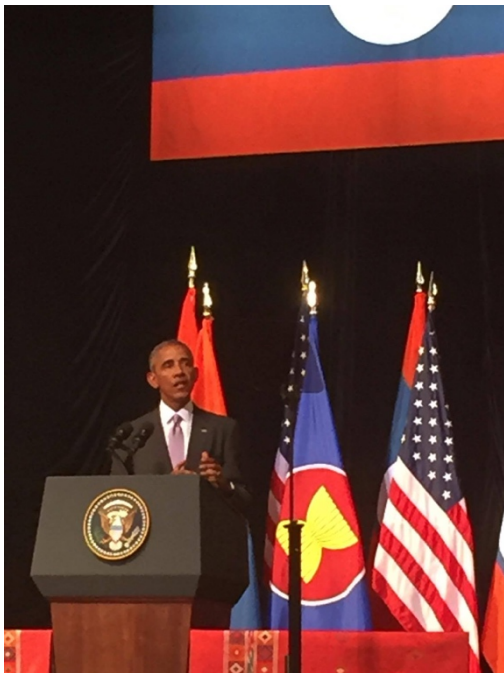
Victim assistance remains a critical need in Laos, as many of the 12,000 survivors of UXO accidents still living in Laos will need services for the rest of their lifetimes. These services not only include medical care, prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation, but psycho-social services, life-skills training and home rehab to accommodate their mobility needs. The data and infrastructure related to providing these services are still in need of improvement.

Thoumy Silamphan, founder of the Quality of Life Association, noted, “As a UXO accident survivor, I hope that the President will ensure that the many agencies who help survivors will be able to extend high quality services to all the affected areas of the country.”

As we pause to celebrate this milestone, Legacies of War remains committed to continuing its work of education, advocacy and monitoring in collaboration with all of our partners until the task is done.

Legacies of War (www.legaciesofwar.org)

Legacies of War was founded in 2004 to raise awareness about the history of the Vietnam War-era bombing of Laos and advocate for greater U.S. funding to address its legacy. For interviews or additional information please contact Channapha Khamvongsa, Executive Director, 703-868-0030, channapha@legaciesofwar.org.



Left: President Obama delivering his remarks at the Lao National Cultural Hall in Vientiane, Laos

Right: Executive Director Channapha Khamvongsa awaiting the President's remarks

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