PRESS RELEASE

40 years after U.S. secret bombing exposed,
U.S. Congressional hearing looks at leftover unexploded bombs

(Washington D.C., April 19, 2010) – Legacies of War ("Legacies") will testify at the House of Representatives hearing, “Legacies of War: Unexploded Ordnance in Laos,” led by the leadership of Representative Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (D-AS), Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment (Committee on Foreign Affairs). The hearing comes exactly 39 years ago when a Senate hearing, chaired by the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, helped to expose the U.S. secret bombing of Laos and shed light on the destruction and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Lao refugees. Today’s House of Representative hearing is the first in 40 years to look at the current devastation caused by these deadly unexploded bombs.

“It has been nearly 40 years since the secret U.S. bombing campaign in Laos was finally revealed to Congress and the American public. Yet, all these years later, massive quantities of UXO remain a dangerous threat to the daily lives of the people in Laos. As a Vietnam Veteran and as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs’ Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, I will not rest until we make this right. It is shameful that U.S. bombs dropped four-decades ago are still killing and maiming innocent civilians, including innocent children," Chairman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega said. Chairman Faleomavaega visited Laos in 2008 and again in 2009 and promised government leaders and NGOs that he would hold a hearing to bring further attention to this issue.

“I commend Legacies of War for the good work they are doing and my heart also goes out to those at the COPE center in Vientiane who are suffering still as a result of our failures to clean up the mess we left behind,” the Congressman added.

Channapha Khamvongsa, executive director, will deliver the statement on behalf of Legacies of War, “The problem of UXO in Laos has been allowed to persist far too long. Too many innocent lives have been lost. Too many farmers and children have been left disabled, their lives forever changed. But it is not too late to stop this senseless suffering. This is one of those rare tractable problems with a clear and effective solution. The U.S. has a responsibility to clean up the unexploded bombs it left behind in Laos and to provide support for those who have been harmed since the end of the war.”
The U.S. spent $17 million a day (today’s dollars) for nine years bombing Laos. However, the U.S. has provided on average only $2.7 million per year for clearance in Laos over the past 15 years. Put another way, the U.S. spent more in three days dropping bombs on Laos ($51M in today’s dollars) than they have spent in the last 15 years ($40M) cleaning them up.

Other testimonies included: Scot Marciel of the State Department, Virgil Wiebe of the Mines Advisory Group and of the Humpty Dumpty Institute.

**Background**

Laos is the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. Vietnam War-era bombings left one-third of the country contaminated with vast quantities of unexploded ordnance (UXO). Today, cluster bombs litter forests, rice fields, villages, school grounds, roads, and other populated areas. Tens of thousands of people have been killed or injured by UXO since the bombing ceased; each year there continue to be more than 300 new casualties, most of whom are children. Nearly 40 years on, only a fraction of these munitions have been destroyed.

A full copy of Legacies of War Congressional Testimony can be viewed at http://legaciesofwar.org/.

**About Legacies of War**

Legacies of War is a non-profit organization whose mission is to raise awareness about the history of the Vietnam War-era bombing in Laos and advocate for the clearance of unexploded bombs, to provide space for healing the wounds of war, and to create greater hope for a future of peace.

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