PRESS RELEASE

Former Ambassadors to Laos Call on Secretary Clinton to visit country and Increase Funding for Unexploded Bomb Removal in Laos

Decades after war, hundreds continue to be killed or injured by unexploded bombs every year

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 8, 2011 – Six former United States ambassadors or chiefs of mission to Laos have written to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asking her to visit Laos during her upcoming Southeast Asian trip and to commit to substantially increasing U.S. funding for the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) left behind during the Vietnam War.

“During the war,” the ambassadors wrote, “over 2 million tons of U.S. munitions were dropped on Laos, more than was dropped on Germany and Japan combined in the Second World War. On a per capita basis, Laos is the most heavily bombed country in history. Up to 30 percent of these bombs failed to detonate, and UXO in Laos continues to impede development and cause hundreds of casualties each year.”

All six former ambassadors endorsed Legacies of War’s recommendation for the United States to increase its funding to the UXO sector in Laos to $10 million per year for the next 10 years. This would add to the contributions of other international donors to help clear priority land for farming and development and keep civilians safe from the threat of UXO.

The ambassadors noted the significant progress that has been made in clearing UXO in Laos. Over 1 million UXO have already been destroyed and 23,000 hectares have cleared for agriculture. The ambassadors also emphasized, however, that “there is still so much more to do.”

Brett Dakin, Chair of the Board of Directors of Legacies of War, said he hoped the letter will lead to a concrete increase in U.S. funding. “When six highly respected ambassadors call on the U.S. to do more to support UXO clearance in Laos, this means something has got to be done. I do hope that their judgment and years of experience in representing the United States abroad will be taken into account in determining future U.S. funding for UXO removal.”

The letter was signed by the following former United States ambassadors or chiefs of mission to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Theresa A. Tull, Harriet Isom, Wendy J. Chamberlin, Charles B. Salmon Jr., Victor L. Tomseth, and Douglas A. Hartwick. Collectively, they served in Laos from 1983 to 2004.

About Legacies of War

Legacies of War (www.legaciesofwar.org) 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.

Contact

Ambassador (ret.) Douglas A. Hartwick, Honorary Committee, Legacies of War
Cell: 571-432-9409  Email: dahartwick@gmail.com

Brett Dakin, Chair of the Board of Directors, Legacies of War
Cell: 347-268-8598  Email: brett@legaciesofwar.org

Channapha Khamvongsa, Executive Director, Legacies of War
Cell: 703-868-0030  Email: channapha@legaciesofwar.org