PRESS RELEASE

Decline in Casualties from Unexploded Ordnance in Laos Highlights the Success of Reconstruction Efforts

Legacies of War applauds the progress and calls for increased investment to finally address the problem of UXO in Laos

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 7, 2011 – Newly released statistics from the government of the Lao PDR reveal that the number of casualties due to unexploded ordinance (UXO) dropped from an average of 300 per year to 117 per year in 2009 and 2010.

The dramatic reduction follows years of sustained efforts from Laotian teams and international NGOs to combat the threat of UXO. With the help of funding from the U.S. Department of State and other international donors, they have undertaken vast programs for UXO clearance, victim assistance and risk education.

“The decline in casualties is great news out of Laos,” said Channapha Khamvongsa, Executive Director of Legacies of War. “It just goes to show how remarkably effective the UXO sector is in Laos; a clear sign for NGOs and donors to continue their support. This progress could potentially be a model of how sustained investment and collaboration can lead to addressing one of the most critical post-conflict issues in the region.”

Despite the progress, the threat of UXO still looms large in Laos. Last month, three young boys, Sod (12), Vanthid (9) and Son Phet (10), became casualties of a UXO accident after venturing into the forest in search of food in Vilavouly District, Savannakhet Province. Sod was killed. Vanthid spent the subsequent week in hospital. Son Phet is paralyzed for life.

This message of caution was echoed by Khamvongsa, “Although the decline in casualties is encouraging, we should not forget the lives that are still being tragically and unnecessarily lost. The work should only cease when the contaminated land in Laos is cleared and we can be sure that we've done all we can to prevent future harm.”

From 1964 to 1973, 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. Some 80 million unexploded munitions remain. Legacies of War has recommended that the U.S. increase its funding support from $5M to $10M per year over the next 10 years.

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.

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