



## PRESS RELEASE

### Four-Decade-Old Bomb Mistaken for Toy, Kills and Injures 13 in Laos

**March 23, 2017 (Xieng Khouang, Laos)** - A bomb blast on March 21, 2017 injured twelve and killed one, ages 2 to 57, in the northern Lao province of Xieng Khoang. The bomblet, one of an estimated 80 million left over from U.S. bombings 40 years ago, was picked up by a girl, age 10, while walking to school and later brought back to her home, where it exploded. It is believed to be the highest-casualty unexploded ordnance (UXO) accident in decades.

“It is unacceptable that Lao people are still being killed and maimed from bombs dropped over four decades ago. This deadly legacy must end so children can walk to school in safety and villagers can live without fear,” said Legacies of War Executive Director Channapha Khamvongsa.

In 2016, the U.S. government pledged \$90 million in funding to clear bombs in Laos. The three-year commitment includes the country’s first comprehensive national survey of contaminated areas. Under current budget debates, this foreign assistance is at risk for being cut. Rescinding these funds would hinder progress made over the last three decades of international support and cooperation, when UXO casualty rates fell from 300 in 2010 to under 50 over the last couple of years. Over 20,000 have been killed or maimed since the last bombs were dropped, the majority of them children.

“We have a moral obligation to resolve this dark chapter in history, which still threatens the lives and livelihood of the Lao people, many of whom were born two generations after the war ended,” stated Representatives Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Sean Duffy (R-WI), who are leading a bipartisan effort to gather support from their Congressional colleagues in providing no less than \$30 million for UXO clearance in Laos in fiscal year 2018, which would help to fulfill the U.S. pledge.

The majority of U.S. assistance goes to fund bomb clearance activities conducted by humanitarian demining groups, although a small amount supports victim assistance services. Such non-governmental (NGO) groups as World Education and Quality of Life Association (QLA) will be providing critical victim assistance support to the survivors and families of the recent accident.

From 1964 to 1973 the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of ordnance over Laos. More U.S. bombs were dropped on Laos than on Japan and Germany during WWII. Up to 30 percent of these bombs failed to explode on impact. 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 40 percent of the victims in the past 10 years have been children, who unknowingly treat the tennis ball-sized bombs as toys.

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**Legacies of War** ([www.legaciesofwar.org](http://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](mailto:channapha@legaciesofwar.org).