



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. to Provide \$30 Million in 2017 to Address Bomb Legacy in Laos, But 2018 Funding Threatened by Dramatic Cuts

May 30, 2017 (Washington, DC) - Congress has allocated \$30 million to the unexploded ordnance (UXO) sector in Laos for fiscal year 2017, fulfilling the second installment of a U.S. government pledge made by President Obama totaling \$90 million over three years, or \$30 million per year. This funding will be used for ongoing bomb clearance, victim assistance, and risk education, and will be integral in completing a long-overdue countrywide survey of UXO-contaminated areas in Laos, a country beset with 80 million unexploded cluster bomblets dropped more than 40 years ago as part of a secret U.S. bombing campaign.

"It is inexcusable that the people of Laos are still being killed and maimed by U.S. cluster munitions more than four decades after the Vietnam War," said Senator Leahy (D-VT), Vice Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. "I am gratified that the Congress included \$30 million to remove cluster munitions in 2017. That is 10 times more than when I first included funds in the budget for this purpose a decade ago, and it gives me hope for the future. We want to accelerate and expand this program as quickly as possible."

Funding for fiscal year 2018, however, is threatened by significant cuts. The White House budget proposal, if enacted, would slash UXO funding to Laos by 65 percent, from \$30 million to just \$10 million. This would not only compromise ongoing bomb clearance operations, but also hinder implementation of a national survey. This survey is necessary to both effectively prioritize clearance of highly contaminated areas, and to determine the resources and time needed to assure that Lao people live free of the daily threat of bombs.

On a recent learning trip to Laos, Legacies of War met with the parents of a 10-year-old girl who died playing with a bombie she mistook for a toy— a common cause of UXO accidents.

"The accident, which just occurred in March of this year, also seriously injured 11 others, including a 2-year-old girl who wakes up in the middle of the night crying from the pain of shrapnel lodged in her face and head," recounts Legacies of War Executive Director Channapha Khamvongsa. "Legacies of War will continue to adamantly advocate for sustained funding for the Lao UXO sector, not only to prevent future casualties but also to assure that victims receive the ongoing assistance that they so desperately need."

Since its inception in 2004, the core mission of Legacies of War has been to increase awareness about the legacy of the U.S. secret war in Laos, and to advocate for the clearance of unexploded bombs that remain there. Since then, U.S. funds for UXO clearance have increased tenfold, and casualties have dropped from over 300 per year to an average of 50 per year. In March, Legacies spearheaded a bipartisan Dear Colleague letter in the House to advocate for \$30 million in U.S. funding to the Laos UXO sector for fiscal year 2018. Grassroots outreach by Legacies supporters to their representatives helped to garner 18 signatures on the letter

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Legacies of War (www.legaciesofwar.org) is the only U.S. based organization dedicated to raising awareness about the continuing devastation that has resulted from the Vietnam War-era bombing of Laos. For interviews or additional information please contact Channapha Khamvongsa, Executive Director, channapha@legaciesofwar.org.