PRESS RELEASE

Former Ambassadors to Laos Call on Secretary Clinton to Dramatically Increase Funding for Unexploded Bomb Removal in Laos

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

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 14, 2010 – Former United States ambassadors to Laos are calling on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to significantly increase funding for the removal of unexploded ordnance left behind in Laos during the Vietnam War. The ambassadors have endorsed the recommendation of Legacies of War, a U.S. non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness about the unexploded ordnance (UXO) problem in Laos, that the U.S. make an annual commitment of $10 million over the next ten years for unexploded bomb removal in Laos. In a letter to Secretary Clinton, the ambassadors stated that “only steady U.S. leadership and additional resources will ultimately bring this sad and unfortunate legacy of the Vietnam War to a safe and honorable conclusion.”

The ambassadors’ letter follows this week’s meeting in Washington, D.C. between Secretary Clinton and the Foreign Minister of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, marking the first visit by a senior Lao official to the U.S. in over thirty years.

The ambassadors noted the steady progress that has been made by Laos in areas such as economic and trade liberalization and religious freedom since the end of the Vietnam War. However, the ambassadors reminded Secretary Clinton of the lingering legacy of war: the scourge of UXO that still litters the Lao countryside. As the ambassadors wrote, “During the war, over 2.5 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.”

The letter was signed by the following former United States ambassadors to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Theresa A. Tull, Charles B. Salmon, Jr., Victor L. Tomseth, Wendy J. Chamberlin, 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.

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