



**LEGACIES
OF
WAR**
HISTORY HEALING HOPE

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) in Laos: background and recommendation

At least \$250 Million in U.S. Funding necessary to support the UXO sector in Laos

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE UXO SECTOR IN THE LAO PDR

www.legaciesofwar.org



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Legacies of War is the leading U.S.-based educational and advocacy organization working to address the impact of conflict in Laos during the Vietnam War-era, including removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO). We raise awareness about the history of the Vietnam War-era bombing of Laos, provide space for healing the wounds of war, and create greater hope for a future of peace.

This September, President Obama will visit Laos to attend the ASEAN Summits--the first sitting U.S. president ever to visit the country. Legacies of War expects that, during his visit, the President will announce a major commitment to the UXO sector in the Lao PDR. In light of this historic event, we have set forth the following principles that must guide future U.S. assistance to the UXO sector:

- Full funding of a national **survey** of contaminated land.
- **Clearance** of all identified areas of contaminated land.
- Delivery of **services** to survivors via a comprehensive case-management system.
- Comprehensive mines risk **education** in all affected areas.
- **Collaboration** among government, civil society and the affected communities.
- **Independent** monitoring and research

To ensure that these principles are met, no less than **\$25 million/year for 10 years**, for a total commitment of at least \$250 million, in U.S. assistance will be required. If these principles are followed, and the U.S. fulfills its obligation to fully fund the effort, we believe that the Lao PDR will achieve the essential goal of **zero casualties for 10 years**.



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WHY NOW?

After 20+ years of UXO clearance in Laos, the country is on the cusp of significant developments that could finally make life much safer for Lao villagers. What was once thought to be insurmountable now seems achievable in 10-20 years. But the next decade is critical, and a long-term commitment by the U.S. to continue in its role as the leading donor to the UXO sector in the Lao PDR is key to completing this task.

Why are we optimistic? Key recent developments include:

- Improved U.S.-Lao relations, allowing for greater cooperation on a variety of issues important to both countries. President Obama's September visit is a culmination of the warming bilateral relationship.
- A newly-implemented evidence-based survey method which gives planners a more detailed sense of the scale of the UXO problem, and well-defined mapping of highly contaminated areas to be cleared.
- Significant increases in U.S. assistance to the UXO sector in Laos over the past decade to levels that are commensurate with the task at hand.
- Significant increases in international financial assistance to the UXO sector in Laos. Laos signed onto the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008, which holds that state parties have an obligation to help other state parties meet their clearance and victim assistance obligations. As a result, the international community has mobilized resources for Laos, thus increasing overall funding for the UXO sector.
- Knowledge about the individual needs of the 12,000 UXO survivors in Laos that is now becoming accessible via a national database.

Strong, sustained U.S. funding over the next decade will capitalize on these important gains and help forge a legacy of peace out of the painful memories of war.



BACKGROUND

BOMBING AND CLEARANCE EFFORTS

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. engaged in a 9-year intensive bombing campaign over Laos, totaling 580,000 bombing missions--the equivalent of one bombing mission over Laos every 8 minutes around the clock for 9 years. The U.S. dropped 2.2 million tons of ordnance, including 270 million cluster bombs--many of them the size and shape of tennis balls. Roughly 30% of these bombs failed to explode on impact, leaving village fields, gardens and paths littered with lethal ordnance at the end of the war. Efforts to clear the UXO in Laos did not begin in earnest until 1994. Since that time, governments,



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UN agencies, NGOs, and other private agencies have built a network of services related to UXO, including clearance, victim assistance and education.

U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Since the beginning of the humanitarian clearance program in Laos, the U.S. has provided \$84 million for clearance work through the State Department's Weapons Removal and Abatement office. The bulk of this assistance has been disbursed over the past 5 years, and includes support for clearance, improved survey methods, victim assistance, medical support and mines risk education. The U.S. has pledged \$19.5 million in 2016 for the UXO sector in the Lao PDR, which now receives total annual contributions of \$32 million from all governments and agencies involved.

THE UXO SECTOR TODAY

As recently as 2008, casualty rates in Laos totaled 300 or more per year. In 2013 and 2014, the casualty figures dropped to just under 50. Between 75,000-100,000 pieces of lethal ordnance are being destroyed annually through the work of some 3,000 workers in the commercial and humanitarian demining arenas. Improved evidence-based survey methods will make it possible to prioritize the most contaminated land for clearance and further reduce the danger that Lao villagers experience daily.

Despite these significant gains, the number of lethal explosives that remain in the soil is estimated to be in the tens of millions, creating risks for villagers and increasing the cost of development efforts as land must be cleared before construction can begin. In addition, delivery of medical, rehabilitative and psycho-social services to Laos' 12,000 survivors of UXO accidents will be required over their lifetimes.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This September, President Obama will visit Laos to attend the ASEAN Summits--the first sitting U.S. president ever to visit the country. Legacies of War expects that, during his visit, the President will announce a major commitment to the UXO sector in the Lao PDR. In light of this historic event, we have set forth the following principles that must guide future U.S. assistance to the UXO sector:

- Full funding of the evidence-based **survey** method to complete a national survey of contaminated land and identify Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHAs) in all the affected provinces. These include those not currently served by clearance operations, such as Phongsaly, Bolikhambai and Oudomxai.



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- **Clearance** of all identified CHAs throughout the country, as identified by the evidence-based survey method.
- Delivery of **services** to all survivors via a comprehensive case-management system that includes emergency care, rehabilitation, prosthetics and orthotics, trauma healing for survivors and their families, occupational therapy/livelihood training, and home rehabilitation.
- Comprehensive mines risk **education** in all the affected areas via school curriculae, informal educational events at the village level, and media platforms.
- **Collaboration** among government, civil society and people living in affected areas to effectively develop and deliver services.
- **Independent monitoring and research** in order to develop a sense of the overall changes and needs in the sector.

To ensure that these principles are met, no less than **\$25 million/year for 10 years**, for a total commitment of at least \$250 million, in U.S. assistance will be required. If these principles are followed, and the U.S. fulfills its obligation to fully fund the effort, we believe that the Lao PDR will achieve the essential goal of **zero casualties for 10 years**.