



PRESS RELEASE

During Historic Visit to Laos, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry Commits to Addressing Problem of Leftover U.S. Bombs from Vietnam Era

February 4, 2016 (Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Laos last week, only the third Secretary in history to do so. Legacies of War was encouraged by Kerry's remarks during his visit about the need for the U.S. to finally address the legacy of unexploded bombs in Laos. While U.S. funding for bomb removal has grown in recent years, the number of casualties in Laos each year is "still too many," as Kerry himself noted. A key step toward bringing this number to zero would be to at least double U.S. funding for bomb removal and victim assistance in Laos over the next decade.

U.S. Representative Mike Honda (D-CA), who visited Laos in 2010 as part of a bipartisan Congressional delegation, remarked, "I applaud Secretary Kerry's commitment to bomb removal and victim assistance in Laos. We have a moral obligation to fix this problem, and to undo the injustice that we inflicted upon this region of the world. That is why I continue to fight for robust funding to support the bomb clearance and victim services. We have to clean up after our mistakes – and make sure we never repeat them. We must – and we can – do more."

While then-Lt. Kerry was serving in Vietnam, a secret U.S. bombing campaign was taking place next door in Laos. The U.S. flew 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, the equivalent of one bombing mission every eight minutes, around the clock, for nine years. The U.S. dropped more than 270 million cluster munitions, many the size of a tennis ball. With a failure rate of 25-30%, tens of millions of these bombs failed to explode. They still litter the fields, gardens and village paths of Laos today. Since the bombing ended, there have been more than 20,000 casualties due to unexploded bombs in Laos.

U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (D-MN), whose district includes a large number of Laotian and Hmong Americans, remarked, "I commend Secretary Kerry for his support for UXO clean-up in Laos. The U.S. has a moral obligation to clean up the American made bombs that continue to threaten the lives of the Lao people. Congress should provide increased and sustained funding for UXO clean-up because it's an American-made mess. It is in America's interest to demonstrate our commitment to the Lao people and strengthen U.S.-Lao relations."

Thanks to strong support from Congressional allies like Senator Patrick Leahy, Representatives Honda, McCollum, Nita Lowey, and many others, U.S. support for bomb removal and victim assistance in Laos will reach an unprecedented \$19.5 million in 2017. However, less than one percent of the estimated 80 million leftover bombs in Laos has been cleared. And more than 12,000 survivors in Laos will be in need of medical and rehabilitation services for the rest of their lives.

Legacies of War (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.