Statement by Mr. Maythong Thammavongsa,
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on Clearance at the Protocol V Meeting of Experts
11 April 2013, Geneva

Mr. Coordinator,

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation for your hard work as coordinator on clearance. My delegation recognized that your efforts have greatly contributed to the advancement of the goal and objective of the Protocol.

Mr. Coordinator,

Lao PDR was once a battle field of a heavy fighting during the Indochina War and in fact it is the most heavily bombed country in the world per capita. 14 out of the total 17 provinces of the country are contaminated by unexploded ordnance of various types. Clearance of UXO unofficially started at the end of the war, but the official clearance started later in 1996 when the UXO Lao was established. Up to 2012, a cumulative total of approximately 39,000 hectares of land had been cleared. In 2012 itself, 5,603 hectares of land were cleared. Of this, approximately 4,807 hectares were released for agriculture and 796 hectares for other development purposes. Clearance and roving teams destroyed a combined 81,862 items of UXO. Of this total, 373 were big bombs, 46,091 were cluster sub-munitions, 3,446 were antipersonnel mines and 35,052 were other types of UXO.

Mr. Coordinator,

Let me share some of the specific information with regards to the questions to be focused in our exercise today.

On the question whether Lao PDR has reliable data on the extent of the contamination, where the ERW is located, and what type of explosives and munitions caused the ERW? I would like to share the following information:

There were efforts to find out the size and location of UXO in my country. In 1997, the Handicap International conducted a baseline survey on the contamination. The outcome of the survey estimated that the contamination was around 87,000 Km2 located in 14 out of 17 provinces of the country. It found out that 2,861 villages which constitute around 25% of all villages are contaminated by UXO. Of these, 1,553 villages reported contamination by cluster submunitions, the most common type of UXO found. However, the survey did not visit every part of the country and it could not provide comprehensive detail on the location and boundary of each contaminated area.
Therefore, the size of the contamination as stated above may be questionable. And we are now trying to address this issue, by exploring and testing various methods, such as land release and district focused approach, both to help expediting clearance rate and to identify the right method for future comprehensive baseline survey.

On the type of ERW, the most common one is cluster submunitions, and there are various kind of UXO, such as big bombs, mortar, shell, hand grenade, white phosphorous, land mine and others.

On the question whether Lao Government has evaluated the long term impact of existing ERW, the answer is “yes”. Since the ERW has continued to claim lives and limbs of the local population in a significant number and constituted one of the key factors that caused poverty in the affected community, the Lao Government has taken UXO issue as one of the national priorities. It has established National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for UXO/Mine Action, to regulate, coordinate, and ensure quality in all UXO activities undertaken in Lao PDR. It has adopted its MDG 9, a localized MDG to address UXO issue in an ambitious and long term manner. It has adopted the revised 10-year National Strategy for the UXO sector, The Safe Path Forward II, which will guide the work in the sector through to 2020.

On the question on which government agency or department is responsible for dealing with exiting ERW, The Ministry of Defence and NRA are the two key players on this issue. However, as the ERW is a cross cutting issue, there are many other government ministries involved as well, such as Ministry of Health for victim assistance in term of medical care; Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare dealing with disabled persons in term of social economic reintegration and vocational training; Ministry of Education and Sport dealing with curriculum on UXO danger to be taught at the UXO affected districts and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism to help educating general public through mass media on the danger of UXO and safe behavior.

On the question of resources available for the clearance of existing ERW, the fund is mostly from contribution from donor countries, international organizations and NGOs. Lao Government has made in kind contribution to the project and some financial contribution, such as yearly rental fee for UXO Lao office and recently the fund for construction of the UXO Lao office in Attapeu province. The government has the intension to increase its financial contribution in the near future.

My last point to share with you on how ERW is cleared and destroyed if a civilian finds a piece of existing ERW. Since the ERW is the big and common problem in many provinces, there is a well established network on how to report when you find a piece of ERW. The village head is the key person to inform, he or she will then report to the clearance operator working in the area to take action, or to report to district authority and then report further to provincial authority in case of there is no operator working there. Then the district authority or the provincial
authority will coordinate with UXO Lao or other clearance operator working in the area and the roving team will be sent to clear or destroy the ERW.

In case of the ERW found in the province that there is no operator working there, upon receiving information from the provincial authority, the NRA will coordinate with Ministry of Defence for sending its roving team to destroy the ERW.

I thank you for your kind attention.