Session 1 – The Implementation of the 7th NSEDP – Priorities and Targets for 2014-2015 – Preparation of the 8th NSEDP

On behalf of the United Nations in Lao PDR, I would like to congratulate the Government of Lao PDR on maintaining consistent economic growth while taking measures to minimize fiscal constraints. In the spirit of the UN Development Assistance Framework, the UN will continue to support the country’s development for the remaining period of the 7th NSEDP, as well as to help the Government prepare for the Post 2015/SDGs and the graduation from the Least Developed Country status by the 2020s.

While the country’s economy is growing, social development also needs to be increased and sustained. For sustainable and inclusive growth, it is important to ensure economic development is actually translating into poverty reduction and improvement of the well-being of the people of Lao PDR, rural and urban alike, as well as among all ethnic groups. Persistent and in some instances growing inequities in outcomes across different provinces and socio-economic groups negatively affects the prospects of the country’s further economic growth. The Government is encouraged to further strengthen policies and service delivery modalities that take into account gender differentials and promote equal opportunities and outcomes for men, women and children, particularly the most vulnerable groups.

Lao PDR has a number of opportunities at the global and regional levels from its involvement in the WTO and its ASEAN integration. We therefore encourage the Government to undertake a thorough cost-benefit analysis and examine possible impacts on various groups of people, particularly women, in order to have a well-established position in this global and regional debate and integration process, including the areas of trade facilitation and also the potential threats to prosperity and security from Transnational Organized Crime activities in the region. In this regard, the UN would also like to recognize the continued coordination efforts of the Government of Lao PDR to address illicit drugs and the threat of transnational crime in the country while encouraging it to do even more in an effort to curb these disturbing trends.

The building of resilience for the country, both at the economic macro-level and micro-level, will be key to the success of Lao PDR’s future. Linked to the coming into force of the ASEAN Economic Community, it is important to clearly identify Lao PDR’s country
comparative advantage, know its strength and develop policy and measures to leverage that. This is especially true with respect to its labour market and the potential that exists with a significantly young population structure as well as local employment promotion in rural areas through an integrated approach.

At the same time, it is essential to emphasize the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility/Value and to encourage the private sector to make more meaningful contributions to the country’s development as partners in sustainable development. Investments will continue to drive economic growth, so greater transparency, and environmental accountability in practices should therefore be prioritized.

Session 2 – Progress of the implementation of the action points from the HL RTM in 2013 – MDG implementation – addressing off-track targets and acceleration measures

On behalf of the United Nations in Lao PDR, I would like to commend the Government on the advancements made toward achieving the MDGs. The UN and development partners will continue to put our collective efforts toward accelerating the progress made in the unattained MDGs, particularly those that address the cross-cutting issues of gender and the environment, acknowledging the need for building resilience to climate related impacts, and we encourage the Government of Lao PDR to do the same. As well, addressing the commitment made in the Millennium Declaration to protect and combat all forms of violence against women and children is essential to achieving the MDGs, as is the assurance that the fundamental human rights of all persons are respected and defended. Further, collecting gender disaggregated data is a must to better serve gender equality and women’s empowerment goals.

We would like to recognize the unique challenge of Lao PDR with regards to UXOs, and encourage more support to reduce the impact of UXO contamination and to guide this particular area toward its MDG targets. In view of the daunting tasks ahead, the UN welcomes and further supports recent efforts led by national authorities in embracing new approaches and techniques to enhance the efficiency of UXO clearance work and to engage civil society as key partners.

On MDG 1, the Government has demonstrated increased political commitment to the issue of Food and Nutrition Security and in relation to the Right to Adequate Food. The results from the recent Saravane RT provincial consultation in September, the establishment of the National Nutrition Committee and the support and hard work provided by the secretariat of this Committee have demonstrated a strong commitment by the Government to addressing this critically off-track MDG target. The initial success of the Multisectoral Plan on Food and Nutrition Security is expected to be further strengthened by the combined efforts of the UN and World Bank in their
discussions with the Chief Executives Board in Washington D.C. next week as part of the MDG Acceleration Framework Review on nutrition in Lao PDR. This Multisectoral Plan needs to be fully supported by adequate policies addressing issues such as land tenure and management, accessibility and affordability of food, gender and inclusion of the most vulnerable. We continue to encourage stronger coordination among all stakeholders, alignment to the Multisectoral Plan and the engagement of multisectoral actors in dealing with these issues.

Reviewing the other MDGs, the health sector remains at risk of missing the national and international targets set under the MDGs unless allocations to the health sector receive significant increases. In terms of positive developments from this sector, we would like to acknowledge that the Government has made persistent efforts and demonstrated the highest political commitment in efforts to raise immunization rates and in 2014 Lao PDR celebrated the milestone of eliminating Maternal and Neo national Tetanus. Sustaining these efforts will have an impact on further reducing child mortality rates.

We also encourage the national health system to further integrate nutrition interventions into the next Health Sector Development Plan 2016-2020 in order to ensure a universal access to all direct nutrition actions as well as those impacting on nutrition, such as water and sanitation. On this last sector, Lao PDR has set targets of 80% national coverage for water supply and 60% for sanitation. Accelerating progress towards these targets is essential to addressing under nutrition.

The UN would also like to note Lao PDR’s impressive and rapid progress towards Universal Primary Education, but low primary school completion rates will result in the MDG2 target not being met. We would encourage a continued emphasis within the upcoming Education Sector Development Plan (2016-20) and its’ associated budget towards improved results within basic education, which will continue to be a critical area in the post-MDG environment.

Finally, the UN would also like to commend the efforts made in facilitating dialogue between the Government and Civil Society in 2014, including areas such as INGO decree implementation guidelines as well as NPA decree revision. Some of these consultations have resulted in positive developments, and we hope that the spirit of these open consultations will continue to be a progressive influence on the relationship between the Government and Civil Society, resulting in an expanded space for civil society engagement.

End of Statements