Statement by Lao Delegation  
on Clearance at the Expert Meeting of Protocol V  
26 April 2012, Geneva

Mr. Coordinator,

I would like join previous speakers to congratulate you on your tireless and excellent work on Clearance. Since I take the floor for the first time, may I take this opportunity to thank for the sponsorship program extended to my delegation without which our participation in this exercise may face some difficulty.

Mr. Coordinator,

Lao PDR was once a battle field of a heavy fighting during the Vietnam War and in fact 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. Therefore, UXO becomes a part of life, particularly in rural area where people’s life is very risky when they are forced to cultivate the contaminated land. Clearance of UXO officially started since 1996 and up to the end of 2011 about 28,545 ha of land have been cleared, about 1,333,402 UXO were destroyed, among those 6,257 were big bombs, 545, 127 were cluster munitions, 6,698 were antipersonnel mines and other kind of ERW were 775,320 units.

Mr. Coordinator,

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

On the measures to ensure that clearance operations are both efficient and effective, I would like to share some of our experiences as follows:

Firstly, we have national UXO/Mine operations standards drawn from the international best practices. The national standards describe all the requirements for the UXO operators to be followed. One of the key components to achieve efficiency and effectiveness is the quality assurance and quality control. The quality management concept in Lao PDR is built upon two mutually supporting components. The first one is an internal quality management by UXO operators and the second one is an external quality management done by the National Regulatory Authority.

The internal quality management required that all UXO operators must have persons in charge of quality assurance and quality control of the organization in order to ensure the national standards is followed.

The external quality management falls under the responsibility of the National Regulatory Authority or NRA. External QA inspections will be carried out on clearance
organisations to confirm that they are applying their approved operational procedures in a manner that will result in the safe, effective and efficient clearance/release of land and/or disposal of UXO. All clearance organisations carrying out UXO/mine clearance, including technical survey, will be subject to external QC inspections. These inspections will involve the physical inspection of samples of cleared or surveyed land to determine if clearance requirements are being achieved. It is a requirement that operator includes QA and QC in its project design and followed the national standards.

Secondly, planning is another important aspect for achieving efficiency and effectiveness. Since the contamination in Lao PDR is so huge, we need to ensure that the land that has been cleared is cost effective that is it is to be used after it has been cleared. To achieve this goal, we have carried out the planning process in a bottom up manner that involved the participation of the affected community and the land owners. The village committee will discuss and submit its list of priority plots of land within their village to be cleared to the district authority which then will be forwarded to the NRA at provincial level where discussion and decision making against the capacity of the clearance operators within the province will be done and approved the annual planning of clearance.

Thirdly, to further improve efficiency and effectiveness, last year the NRA has done a post clearance impact survey aimed at all lands that have been cleared are used. The survey revealed that a small portion of land which have been cleared, particularly for community development project requested by some NGOs were not used due to some funding problem in their later stage.

Mr. Coordinator,

I would like now to turn on the issue of coordination. I would like to inform you that National Regulatory Authority which has been functioned since 2006 is the core organizations to ensure effective coordination within the UXO sector, including the coordination between different actors working on clearance in the field. NRA in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also a main coordination mechanism between the country and donor states, the United Nations and other organizations in the planning, organizing and carrying out the clearance programmes.

My government has included the UXO issue in the five-year social economic development plan and in collaboration with UNDP has adopted MDG 9 in 2010 which is a localized MDG specifically for Lao PDR to be achieved certain targets by the year 2020.

UXO sector working group meeting is good venue for coordination within the sector. We organize the UXO sector working group meeting twice a year. The first one is in the beginning of each year and the second meeting is before the annual Round Table Meeting where donors and government will meet to discuss the annual social economic development plan. The objective of the UXO sector working group meeting is to present UXO sector progress report, to share information about UXO issues and national strategic plan, to share funding situation, pilot
projects if any and other issues. The participants of the meeting are from line Ministries, UN agencies, donor countries, UXO operators, NGOs working in Laos.

At a more technical level, we have 3 technical working groups, namely on clearance, mine risk education and victim assistance which previously meet every 2 months, but since this year they will meet every 3 months. The meeting is the venue to share progresses and challenges of their respective works.

Mr. Coordinator,

Lao PDR has submitted its instrument of consent to be bound by Protocol V in December 2011. We are aware of and will try our best to fulfill the obligations under the Protocol. Since the UXO problem is so huge in my country and it required time and resources to address it, I would like to recall Articles 7 and 8 under the Protocol which called for states in a position to do so to provide assistance to address the UXO issue in my country.

Last but not least, I would like to express our sincere appreciations to donor countries, international organizations and NGOs for the past valuable assistance in addressing UXO problem in my countries. I hope that your assistance will be continued in the future.

I thank you for your kind attention.