



# LAO PDR

## RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

- Lao PDR should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.

## CONTAMINATION

Lao PDR is contaminated by anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines left by the Indochina conflict of the 1960s and 1970s but the extent is not known. All sides in the war in the 1970s laid anti-personnel mines, particularly along borders and around military bases and airfields. A Handicap International survey in 1997 found mines in all 15 provinces it surveyed, contaminating 214 villages.<sup>1</sup> In the past clearance operators have estimated Lao PDR may have 1,000 mined areas.<sup>2</sup>

The remote location of many of these areas means that mines have little impact and are not a clearance priority. Of 133,349 items of explosive remnants of war (ERW) destroyed by operators in 2016, only 112 (0.08%) were mines.<sup>3</sup> The National Regulatory Authority (NRA), however, has stated that anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines were “used in abundance” and observed that “with a steady expansion of land use “mined areas” will become areas for growing concern.”<sup>4</sup>

The NRA said widely used “gravel mines” had all degraded but remaining mine types included United States-manufactured M14 blast anti-personnel mines, M16 bounding fragmentation mines, M18 claymore mines, and M15 and M19 anti-vehicle mines, and Soviet and Chinese anti-personnel mines, POMZ fragmentation mines, and Soviet-era TM41, TM46, and TM57 anti-vehicle mines.<sup>5</sup>

## PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The NRA, created by government decree in 2004 and active since mid-2006, had an interministerial board chaired by the deputy prime minister and composed of representatives from 11 government ministries.<sup>6</sup> A decree issued in February 2015 increased the size of the NRA board to 22 members, including, for the first time, a permanent deputy chairman expected to take care of the daily business of the board. The decree also specified that the NRA “has a government budget included in the general budget” of the Board’s president.<sup>7</sup>

In November 2012, Bounheuang Douangphachanh, a minister in the Prime Minister’s Office and chairman of the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, was appointed chairman of the NRA Board.<sup>8</sup> A parliamentary election in March 2016 led to leadership changes, including the retirement of Bounheuang Douangphachanh. A September 2016 decree placed the NRA under the control of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.<sup>9</sup>

The NRA has four sections: Administration and Finance; Planning and Cooperation; Quality and Standards; and Operations and Information. Capacity includes only a single quality management team.

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## LAND RELEASE

No systematic mine clearance was conducted during 2016, though operators destroyed a total of 112 anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. Of the total, 10 were destroyed during UXO clearance operations, 35 during roving tasks, 15 in the course of non-technical survey, and 7 in technical survey.<sup>10</sup>

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## ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Lao PDR is not a state party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Nonetheless, Lao PDR has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of anti-personnel mines as soon as possible.

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- 1 Handicap International, “Living with UXO, National Survey on the Socio-Economic Impact of UXO in Lao PDR”, Vientiane/Brussels, 1997, p. 7.
  - 2 Interview with Michael Hayes, Programme Manager, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Vientiane, 5 February 2004.
  - 3 “Sector Achievements 2016”, received from NRA, 19 May 2017.
  - 4 NRA website, “UXO types: Mines”, at: <http://www.nra.gov.la/mines.html>.
  - 5 Ibid.
  - 6 NRA, “UXO Sector Annual Report 2009”, Vientiane, May 2009, p. 14.
  - 7 Government Decree No. 43, “On the appointment of the NRA Board”, (Unofficial translation), 3 February 2015; and interview with Phoukhieou Chanthasomboune, NRA, Vientiane, 28 April 2015.
  - 8 “Announcement 93: UXO clearance for socio-economic development projects in the Lao PDR”, NRA Board, 19 November 2012.
  - 9 Interview with Allan Poston, Technical Adviser, UNDP, 26 April 2017; with Phoukhieou Chanthasomboune, NRA, 27 April 2017.
  - 10 “Sector Achievements 2016”, received from NRA, 19 May 2017.