

# LAO PDR

## CONTAMINATION

The extent of landmine contamination in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) 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> and 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 133,497 items of explosive remnants of war (ERW) destroyed by operators in 2015, only 150 (0.1%) were mines.<sup>3</sup> The National Regulatory Authority (NRA), however, has stated that "with a steady expansion of land use "mined areas" will become areas for growing concern."<sup>4</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>5</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>6</sup>

1 HI, "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 NRA, "2015 Sector Achievements" (data as of 29 April 2016), provided by NRA, 4 May 2016.

4 NRA website, "UXO types: Mines", at: <http://www.nra.gov.la/mines.html>.

5 NRA, "UXO Sector Annual Report 2009", Vientiane, May 2009, p. 14.

6 Government Decree No. 43, "On the appointment of the NRA Board", (Unofficial translation), 3 February 2015; and interview with Phoukhieo Chanthasomboune, NRA, Vientiane, 28 April 2015.

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>7</sup> A parliamentary election in March 2016 led to leadership changes, including the retirement of Bounheuang Douangphachanh. As of May 2016, it was not clear who would succeed him as NRA chairman.

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

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## LAND RELEASE

No systematic mine clearance was conducted during 2015, although, as noted above, operators destroyed a total of 150 landmines (anti-vehicle and anti-personnel combined). Of the total, 108 were destroyed during UXO clearance operations, 36 during roving tasks, and 6 in the course of technical survey.<sup>8</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 that landmines be cleared as soon as possible.<sup>9</sup>

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7 "Announcement 93: UXO clearance for socio-economic development projects in the Lao PDR", NRA Board, 19 November 2012.

8 NRA, "2015 Sector Achievements" (data as of 29 April 2016), provided by NRA, 4 May 2016.

9 Lao PDR is a state party to the 1996 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6(1) of which stipulates that: "Every human being has the inherent right to life."