

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to lead a high level delegation of the Lao PDR to the 44th CEDAW Session for the review of the 6th and 7th periodic reports on CEDAW implementation in the Lao PDR.

On this occasion, allow me to brief you on the main content of the 6th and 7th periodic reports that the Lao Government had previously submitted to the CEDAW Committee, and I will present to you additional information on the progress made from 2006 till 2009.

Key achievements attained by the Government during 2006-2009:

We have adopted the National Policy on Women's Empowerment from 2006 to 2010 with a view to promoting and protecting the legitimate interests of Lao women, creating favourable conditions for their full participation in national development, ensuring their gains from the implementation of the Government's strategies and programs while removing obstacles for the advancement of women.

The success made in the national socio-economic development plan and the National Policy for Women's Empowerment over the last 3 years constitutes by itself a pro-active contribution to the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, other international treaties, the MDGs and CEDAW. Allow me now to brief you as follows:

1/ Definition of the discrimination against women:

Our Government has revised the criminal law by stipulating that discrimination against women is construed as a criminal act meaning that such an act is in violation with the criminal law or criminal provisions of the law on the development and protection of women.

2/ Obligations for the elimination of discrimination

In fact, the Lao PDR has continuously integrated CEDAW provisions into the country's constitution as well as enacted and revised laws and legislation of the Lao PDR in a pragmatic and systematic manner while ensuring gender equality and conformity with CEDAW, especially with the Law on the development and protection of Women. Those laws are legally binding and being gradually implemented by the People's Court and the People's Prosecutor's Office.

3/ Development and advancement of women

The attention paid by the Lao PDR to the development and advancement of women can be illustrated by the following key results:

3.1/ The establishment of Women Parliamentarian Group: The objective of this group is to strengthen capacity for women parliamentarians so that they do not only represent their fellow women in number, but through their active contribution to the drafting of legislation and scrutinizing the work of the Government, especially the follow-up on the implementation of the national socio-economic plan (NSEDP) adopted by the National Assembly; and monitoring the work of the People's Court and People's Prosecutor's Office on law enforcement, in particular the law on the development and protection of women's rights.

3.2/ Activities undertaken by the Lao National Commission for Advancement of Women (Lao NCAW)
Since its inception 5 years ago, the Lao NCAW has attained key results such as: the Commission had studied and submitted the draft of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women (2006-2010) for Government's approval in 2006. Thereafter, the Lao NCAW has utilized the Government's allocated

budget as well as mobilized local and foreign financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the said Policy. The Lao NCAW also serves as a focal point for the Government as well as for gender mainstreaming, gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

In accordance with its mandate, the LaoNCAW has set up its affiliations in governmental agencies and local administration. At the same time, the LaoNCAW has carried out awareness campaign and strengthen capacity for its affiliations at all levels by entrusting them to implement the national strategy for the advancement of women in their respective agencies through the introduction of a gender mainstreaming sensitive approach in the overall work plan of each sector with a specific time frame for realisation, in particular ensuring a higher number of women leadership in decision making at different levels, and creating a pool of future female leaders and others; Ministries with outstanding performance for this undertaking are the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Education.

The LaoNCAW has vigorously carried out advocacy campaign for the broad knowledge of the society on treaties and action plans related to women through mass media; In addition, a series of seminar and workshop were also held for central and local government officials in order for them to firmly capture the essence of the CEDAW, recommendations of the CEDAW Committee included in the annex, gender mainstreaming role and laws of the Lao PDR related to women's rights. Furthermore, the Lao NCAW had also organized a meeting on the sharing of best practices and an exhibition on gender mainstreaming achievements in the Lao PDR.. The main objective of that meeting was to create a focal point network among public, private sectors, international organizations and NGOs on information sharing, experience and best practices, challenges and opportunities for gender mainstreaming approach in the Lao PDR.

The LaoNCAW has also fulfilled its international obligations by submitting the 6th and 7th national reports on CEDAW implementation in the Lao PDR as well as additional report to CEDAW Committee including the strengthening of gender mainstreaming approach through the ASEAN cooperation framework with the successful organization of the first high level ASEAN Meeting on best practices for the follow up, monitoring and reporting on CEDAW implementation.

3.3 Lao Women's Union (LWU)

It is another key mechanism for the realisation of CEDAW in association with national development. Their activities can be described as follows:

1. Enhance political knowledge and capacity for Lao women of different ethnicities so as to galvanize the Three Virtue Movement (good citizen, good developer, and forging a happy family by focusing on equality between husband and wife, and the end to family violence).
2. Build capacity for LWU institutions at all levels by going out for training programs held within the country and abroad so as to increase their efficiency in handling women's programs.
3. Protect the interests of women and children, and promote gender role through enhanced capacity building on counselling, gender mainstreaming in development activities, and through efficient implementation of the law on the development and protection of women; coordinate with all stakeholders on consultation, research, finding solution, settlement of issues related to women's and children's interests in accordance with their respective mandate.
4. Improve living conditions and promote income generation for women in order to alleviate their poverty by upgrading their knowledge, professionalism and labour skills, creating income generation activities for women and their families, setting up village revolving fund through different schemes.
5. Strive to attract more technical and financial assistance, and enhance cooperation with friendly countries and international organizations.

3.4 We have also set up coordination mechanism between Lao NCAW, LWU and women parliamentarian group that has yielded satisfactory results on the development and protection of women:

The main reason of such a progress lies in the fact that out of the 4 persons presiding in Lao NCAW, there is one woman acting as both the chairperson of LWU and standing member of Lao NCAW. In some

constituencies, women parliamentarians also assume the duty as chairperson of provincial Women's Union and member of SubCAW thus providing a sound environment for the coordination, supervision, involvement in decision making process and greater facility for SubCAW's at all levels to carry out women's empowerment related activities. In the future, we will further intensify our coordination and cooperation aimed at fostering women's empowerment activities to a new height.

3.5 The implementation on Gender Policy and solution to stereotype

In order to attain tangible results for gender equality and the elimination of the discrimination against women, there is a need to address belief in tradition and old stereotype considering that this phenomena negatively affects women, and especially girls starting from the family to school admission and social life. But it is rather difficult to come up with a certain regulation that could dramatically change that kind of attitude in a short period of time. Nevertheless, our Government has been able to basically eliminate the discrimination against women in legal terms and at different government institutions. Some inappropriate practices are still common people's communities living in remote areas due to their attachment to old stereotype as they live in remote areas having little access to government's support and low educational level. Against this backdrop, the Government has therefore taken on board the implementation of gender policy and the advancement of women with national socio-economic development, in particular the Government has linked those issues with the campaign on the implementation of the National Poverty Eradication Strategy by starting with the establishment of villages and cluster development villages, cultural villages, health villages, crime free villages and others. These are the measures aimed at upgrading knowledge and perception of the Lao multi-ethnic people concerning the Government's policy on promoting gender equality.

3.6 Human Trafficking

Trafficking in women and children is another form of human trafficking by taking advantage of people's poverty; Most of the victims from human trafficking come from poor farmer families, unemployed people with low education but willing to make additional income. Therefore, they have struggled hard to find a way out for their own lives and families. There is a considerable number of those people coming to seek employment in the cities and looking for job in neighbouring countries, but some were cheated, exploited and coerced into prostitution. 60 % of the victims are girls with an age from 12 to 18 years old.

In order to address this problem, the criminal law of Lao PDR has laid out a set of penalties for human trafficking perpetrators according to the gravity of their offence; In case if the offence leads to the victim's lifetime disability or HIV/AIDS infection or death, the perpetrator of trafficking in women and children would face life imprisonment and would be fined from 500 million to 1 billion kip, and the seizure of his/her asset as defined by the criminal law or would face death penalty.

3.7 On political – social life:

You may be aware that at the present time, the Lao PDR enjoys firm political stability and harmonious society as the Government has implemented the policy on solidarity and equality among ethnic groups. In that process, gender equality has been gradually realized with an increasing role of women. For instance, the Party Central Committee- the ruling Party has 55 members, out of which there are 4 female members, one more than last time. Among the 32 Ministers or equivalent rank, there are 4 women. This has increased by 3 women from our last report. At the Vice-Minister or equivalent rank, there are 9 women, an increase of 6 women from the last report. Currently, there are 29 women deputies out of 115 members of the National Assembly in which one woman is the Vice President, one woman parliamentarian is the Head of Commission and another woman parliamentarian is the Deputy Head of Commission; There are 2 women ambassadors and 1 consul general. Such an achievement testifies to the implementation of the policy on women's empowerment and gender equality. Nevertheless, the Government will continue to apply other measures to give emphasis to women and give them opportunities to take a pro-active participation in decision making process in the Party's organization and different Government's institutions. But we also call upon the women to strive for excellence in every aspect so as to match their male counterpart.

3.8 On education

The Government has paid a lot of attention to the development of education in order to form highly qualified personnel responsive to the needs of the national development. Currently, in parallel with the expansion of education at all levels, the Government has also established Promotional Education Centre for Women, Ethnic people and people with disability (CEWED). This Centre is the executing agency of the Ministry of Education in carrying out the policy on justice, equality and humanitarian spirit toward disadvantaged people, in particular toward women, ethnic people and disabled people. This aims to gradually narrow the gap of education between urban – rural areas, between sex, ethnic groups and disabled people group leading toward its total elimination including the accomplishment of compulsory education by 2015.

3.9 On public health

To ensure equal access to healthcare services for the people of different ethnicities, our Government has set up a technical team group involved in mothers' and children's health nationwide whose activities cover family planning, healthcare for mother and newborn baby, child healthcare and nutrition. The objective of setting up this group is to strengthen the capacity for healthcare system with an emphasis on delivering healthcare services accessible to all people including those living in rural and remote areas in parallel with the provision of health tips to communities while encouraging them to adopt a positive approach for taking care of their own health. To ensure a dynamic and far-reaching expansion of this undertaking, the Ministry of Health has continuously organized training for medical personnel including the preparation of training course for the development, promotion, support and rehabilitation of the prenatal system nationwide so as to guarantee mothers and newborn's health. In doing so, this would make an important contribution to reducing maternal and infant mortality rate in the Lao PDR.

3.10 On employment

To ensure gender equality in working place, our Government has implemented a number of measures including in legal terms and labour skills development.

The Law on the development and protection of women has defined that the State has outlined a policy to empower women to have the right to take up legal activities in manufacturing, business and services, that they have the right to choose their profession, employment, to get reward and incentives from their work. Furthermore, the labour law has further defined that employer has no right to cancel work contract or force the employee to give up the job such as in the case of pregnant woman or after giving birth to a child less than a year.

In the past, while giving priority to women's admission in technical and vocational schools, the LWU has also established vocational schools exclusively for women at central and local levels.

Since the Lao PDR has been carrying out economic reform policy, especially at a time when countries are facing the impact of global economic crisis, our Government has instructed the Ministry of Labour, LWU, Trade Union, Ministry of Education and other agencies to implement diligently the labour law, the law on the development and protection of women, and to ensure regular employment and labour skills development for women. This aims to raise their work efficiency and improved living conditions.

-Madam Chairperson,
-Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude my report, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the CEDAW Committee for your invaluable recommendations given to us in the course of the presentation of this report. The remarks that I have made is the summary of the CEDAW implementation in the Lao PDR over the past years. As to the details of different issues, our delegation would be pleased to give further explanation to the Committee. I wish to reaffirm that the Lao Government remains strongly committed with its consistent policy and determination to find appropriate measures toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. We are equally responsive to the call made by the UN Secretary General in his global campaign to end violence against women.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of the Lao PDR, I would like to express my sincere thanks and profound gratitude to friendly countries and international organizations for their kind assistance and support rendered to our national development and to the advancement of Lao women leading to a truly gender equality in the Lao PDR.

Thank you for your kind attention.