



**Statement by**

**H.E. Mr. Bounkeuth Sangsomsak , Minister to Prime Minister Office,  
Chairman of the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Rights,  
Head of the Lao Delegation to the 123 Session of ICCPR on 11-12 July  
2018, Geneva, Switzerland**

---

Mr. Chairperson,

Eminent Members of the Committee

It is a great honour for the Lao Delegation to have the privilege to engage, for the first time, in interaction and dialogue with the 18 eminent experts on international law and human rights sharing lessons and experiences for the best implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Your sincere advices and consultative guidance will surely assist the Lao government to discharge its obligations with the most satisfactory results.

I also would like to take this auspicious opportunity to convey to you, Mr. Chairperson, and through you to the secretariat of the Committee for the impeccable arrangement of this significant dialogue.

Mr. Chairperson,

Laos is a small but very old country. Lao people have a very long history of nearly 6000 years. During this long journey the Lao people have gone through serious difficulties threatening, at some point, its existence. For a period of nearly six millenniums of its existence, Laos, as people and as country, were 4 times under foreign aggression and occupation.

The longest foreign occupation lasted almost 300 years and the shortest foreign domination was 60 years. Foreign occupation denied Lao people their dignity as human beings and deprived Lao people of liberty, freedoms and

fundamental rights. Therefore, Lao people have no other choice but to lead a heroic and sacrificed struggle to ensure the survival of their nation. With the foreign occupation lasted nearly 500 years, Lao nation was about to come to extinction. Laos, as country, disappeared 4 times from the world map.

Fortunately, in 1975, our long struggle has finally led us to the foundation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic opening new era of a genuine national independence.

Mr. Chairperson,

From 1975-2018, it is only about 43 years. Lao people and Lao government have deployed tremendous efforts to concentrate on nation building, a nation with a lost culture (nation avec la culture égarée). It was the first time, in 1975, after 500 years under different foreign occupations, Lao people did enjoy liberty and freedom. For 500 years of being denied our basic rights, we are now, more than happy to uphold and cherish our basic rights. We have tasted bitterly and painfully the **nohuman** rights inflicted by our former foreign occupier so that today human rights is the key, the heart of the Lao government policy.

For a new independent state like Laos, the deep sense of human rights means right to live in dignity, right to live in peace, right to enjoy economic prosperity and right to be treated as equal in a balanced and harmonious society in accordance with the level of its progress in economic development. To this purpose, the Lao government has adopted a popular theme as a grand strategy for Laos development. The theme says and I quote:

“Today, we eat full and dress warm”

“Tomorrow, we will eat deliciously and will dress beautifully”

End of quotation.

Mr. Chairperson,

In establishing the Lao PDR, the Lao people have exercised their rights to choose freely its national political existence in accordance with its particularities. In its nation building and development, the Lao government upholds the rule of law, good governance, the principle of people's democracy, promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as promotion of social justice.

By adhering to these principles, the Lao PDR has enjoyed over the past 43 years political stability, sustained economic growth of more than 7% per year, the living conditions of the Lao people have gradually improved. The Lao Government has adopted policies and measures by implementing the 8<sup>th</sup> five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020, the ten-year Development Strategy 2016-2025, the Vision 2030, which will ultimately ensure Laos' graduation from LDC status and categorization as a high-middle income country by 2030. The recent review on Laos LDC status by the UN committee for development policy in March this year indicated that the country has fulfilled two out of three eligibility criteria, namely the thresholds for Gross National Income and Human Assets Index on the way to graduating from LDC status.

Mr. Chairperson,

Promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of the Lao Government's policy. Political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Lao multi-ethnic people are enshrined in the national Constitution, laws and other legal documents, which are in conformity with the obligations and commitments of the Lao PDR at the international and regional levels. As of today, the Lao PDR is a party to 7 UN core human rights treaties: ICCPR, ICSECR, ICERD, CAT, CRPD, CEDAW, CRC and also two Optional Protocols to the CRC.

On the regional context, Laos plays a leading role in the process of drafting the T.O.R. of the ASEAN human rights body as well as ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights. All these demonstrate how much importance that Laos has accorded to this issue.

In the implementation of the provisions of the Covenant, the Government has put in place a policy governing the judicial sector in the

Mr. Chairperson,

At the same time, the National Assembly has already adopted more than 120 laws in the implementation of the Constitution and the provisions of ICCPR. The draft Penal Code has been finalized and approved by the National Assembly and which is now awaiting promulgation by the President. The drafting of the Penal Code was based on the Penal Law of Lao PDR. In addition to the Constitution and laws, the Government has adopted many sub-laws related to the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as contained in the ICCPR.

In the area of legislation, the National Assembly adopted the newly amended Constitution in 2015. This amendment process was transparent, participatory and consultative. One of the new developments in the political system of the country under this newly amended Constitution is the establishment of the provincial People's Assemblies. And also, the term "human rights" is now enshrined in the Constitution, together with the terms "fundamental rights of the Lao citizens".

In this connection, to enhance high level coordination in the implementation of international and regional human rights obligations and commitments, the Lao Government established the National Steering Committee on Human Rights in 2012. The Steering Committee has played an important role in ensuring, promoting and protecting human rights in the Lao PDR. Now, this mechanism is currently under review to strengthen its performance and efficiency. The Lao Government has also established other inter-agency commissions concerning specifically the promotion and protection of human rights of women, children and persons with disabilities.

effort towards strengthening the rule of law and access to justice in order to fully ensure equality before the law and the court, as well as the due process of law and fair trial in accordance with the ICCPR. Human rights are closely linked with the rule of law. Today, the Lao government is implementing the second phase of the Legal Sector Master Plan with the aim that by 2020 Laos would become initially a State of Rule of Law.

The rights to freedoms of expression, assembly and association are guaranteed in the Constitution, laws and decrees. Violation of these fundamental freedoms is a criminal offence punishable by the Penal Law 2005 and is also a criminal offence in the draft Penal Code.

The Government continued to improve the prison conditions and attached importance to training of prison officers to strengthen their capacity building and their understanding of the laws, international norms and principles on prison management and treatment of offenders in accordance with the human rights treaties to which the Lao PDR is party, particularly the ICCPR. The rights and dignity of inmates are protected by the law, those prisoners who have good behaviors are entitled to receive amnesties or reduced sentences.

The Lao Government attaches importance to the rights and legitimate interests of specific groups in the country. The Lao PDR is a multi-ethnic nation consisted of 49 ethnic groups living together in peace, harmony and solidarity. The Constitution and laws, policies and measures of the Government encourage unity, solidarity, non-discrimination and equality of all ethnic groups. Any acts of division of solidarity among ethnic groups are prohibited and punished under the Penal Law. The rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities are protected and promoted through the implementation of the relevant constitutional provisions and specific laws, decrees, national strategies and action programmes.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Lao Government has focused its efforts on raising awareness and dissemination of the ICCPR and other human rights treaties to which the Lao PDR is party. To this end, seminars, workshops and training courses on



human rights were organized for different target audiences including government officials at the central, provincial and district levels, members of the National Assembly, judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, mass organizations, civil society, academic and research institutions as well as students of law schools across the country.

Mr. Chairperson,

The promotion and protection of human rights is an evolving process. Over the past years, the Lao PDR, as a State Party to the ICCPR, has exerted its utmost in the national implementation of the Covenant rights. The cultural and historical diversity and regional particularities suggest that there is no single human rights model as "one size does not fit all". Therefore, it would be an illusion to expect the State parties to the ICCPR to have the same political system and institutions in order to fulfill their obligations under the ICCPR. Instead, unique cultures, local traditions and institutions are the positive and value-added factors that help enhance the implementation of the human rights under the Covenant. ASEAN, for its part, recognizes human rights in its universal concept and its regional particularities.

In this respect, the Lao delegation is particularly pleased to have a dialogue with the esteemed Committee which would provide further assistance and guidance on the full implementation of the ICCPR in the Lao's context, Lao particularities.

Mr. Chairperson,

As the wisdom of our proverb said: "seeing is believing"; my Lao government would like to extend its kind invitation to distinguished Members of the Committee to pay visits to Laos at anytime of your convenience so you can see with your own eyes, the opportunity and challenges, the facilities and difficulties, or the strengths and the constraints of Laos in implementing the ICCPR. After seeing the realities on the ground, your guidance and advices will match to the realities of our country, Laos.

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

In concluding my statement, I would like, with your permission, to emphasize that the communality of the understanding and the implementing process will strengthen the cooperation and partnership between Laos as a State Party and the 18 eminent experts as a wise body guardian of the ICCPR which in turn will ensure the highest quality of the success of the spirit of ICCPR. This cooperative partnership should rely on the high sense of morality characterized by sincerity, understanding, compassion, trust and confidence, and respect of the diversity and particularities. The Lao government always believes that Lao Government and the Committee could work with each other but not against each other. This wise partnership kindly reminds us that ICCPR was conceived and adopted in 1966 where the majority of the members of the United Nations were just emerged from colonization where as today and by next decades the new independent and developing countries will become the top five world economic power and therefore, we will witness the appearance of a New World Economic Order based on the true reality of the twenty first Century which will be a century where all States that had emerged from colonization will stand high to offer without any restraint to their people and citizens to enjoy their fundamental rights as human beings, thus, human rights becoming "People's Rights" as they can exercise all political, economic and social right as enshrined in the noble cause of the ICCPR.

Thank you

