Opening Remarks by Co-chair of the
Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM) 2014

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14th November 2014 – Don Chan Palace Hotel

- His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith - Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
- His Excellency Mr. Somdy Douangdy – Minister of Planning and Investment
- Excellencies Ministers, Vice Ministers, Ambassadors, Head of Development Organizations
- His Excellency Mr. Sisouvanh Vongchomsy, Vice Governor of Saravane Province
- Representatives from government both at national and provincial levels, the National Assembly, Civil Society Organizations, and private sector
- Distinguished participants, colleagues
- Ladies and gentlemen
It is always very impressive to see a great level of participation and I am very honoured to be with you today as a co-chair of this meeting. I would like to thank most sincerely the Chair, His Excellency Somdy Douangdy, Minister of Planning and Investment for his fruitful opening remarks and for his kindness and support in my first Round Table Implementation Meeting.

I also highly appreciate the presence of the His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and look forward to his guidance in keeping our deliberations focused and relevant to supporting national development priorities.

Although this is my first RTIM, since my arrival in June I have engaged in numerous parts of the Round Table Process, including some SWG meetings, such as Governance, UXO and especially in the provincial consultation in September – our hosts in Saravane were most generous and the arrangements were excellent and very conducive to a successful dialogue.

I am pleased also with the continuing engagement in these meetings of a wide array of partners in development, and I look forward to your energetic and pertinent contributions to our dialogue today.

For this meeting to function as an annual RTIM, our focus should be on reviewing development progress in the context of the country’s socio-economic framework. Our focus on implementation is important also as this is the last year of the current NSEDP, and of the campaign worldwide to achieve the MDG targets by 2015. Accelerating progress in reaching off-track MDG targets has been a focus for the last few RTIM meetings and warrants our continuing intensive commitment over the next year.
My wish for our dialogue today, therefore, is that we work collectively in tackling the challenges faced in implementation of the 16 agreed points in four focus areas from last year’s High Level meeting. Thus the background documentation and agenda for today is focused on follow-up to those 16 points.

In that respect I would like now to highlight from amongst those 16 points some priority aspects of progress that can illustrate our discussions today.

The first focus area is **macro-economic management and growth**. Despite progress in stabilizing the macro economy, vulnerabilities remain a concern that warrant continued action across a number of parameters. We should discuss and establish specific actions and the targets against which to measure progress.

It is vital in this context that we examine how the government can manage the budget deficit in 2015 at an acceptable level without compromising expenditures that reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities by tackling the off-track MDGs, including also by improving the quality of expenditures, especially in education and health.

In respect of the preparation of the 8th plan, development partners appreciate the consultations process initiated by government and in that context would welcome a policy dialogue on a sustainable development model for Lao PDR as part of our continuing consultations on the draft Plan.
The second focus area is the **off-track MDGs and action plans.** In respect of the MDG 1 target for Food and Nutrition Security, the lessons learned and shared at the RT provincial consultation should guide further improvements in how to implement the convergence approach to reaching the nutrition targets. I believe we need to promote more multi-stakeholder participation in the converging agenda of tasks, including more integrated support from development partners.

In respect of MDG 7 more effort would be needed to reverse the continuing deterioration of natural resource wealth including forestry and biodiversity, and the related concern with illegal logging and exports. More effective sustainable natural resource management policies and capacities need to be applied to realize progress. We need also to support Lao PDR in its preparations for next years’ summit on environment and climate change.

On the related question of land tenure and management, we are looking forward to a conclusion of the National Land Policy debate through approval by the National Assembly. In that context, development partners have raised reservations with the current draft that expands the criteria for expropriations to include commercial and private rather than just public needs.

The recent SWG meeting and policy forum for MDG 9 UXO concluded with significant progress on a number of critical issues such as evidence based survey and clearance, opening of a civil society fund, and structural enhancements and improved capacities in National Regulatory Agency (NRA) and UXO Lao. I am pleased that the NRA Board meeting will
review these proposals by the end of November, providing a solid basis for higher levels of investment in capacities that will now destroy more UXO and contribute more effectively to poverty reduction in the affected areas.

The third focus area is **governance** reforms, where the SWG reports steady progress across many areas of cooperation. Importantly there have been consultations with INGOs on the revision to the operating guidelines as well as consultations with NPAs on revision of the decree and related matters. The SWG meeting recommended establishing a regular dialogue between CSOs and Government, and development partners encouraged jointly assessing the implementation of the INGO guidelines after one year to ensure the aim of strengthened participation of civil society in development is being realised.

At the recent SWG meeting, the government announced the decision to expand the Sam Sang initiative. Development Partners should collaborate effectively together in support of this national programme once the cost and other implications are fully elaborated and reviewed.

The fourth area of focus is **development cooperation for results**. The VDCAP revision was issued and a monitoring format circulated mid-year. Progress in VDCAP implementation and the general development effectiveness agenda, needs to be followed up closely. I would like to suggest for the Round Table process itself, that we initiate a dialogue next year about how best to improve our development cooperation so we will be ‘fit for purpose’ for 8th plan requirements for LDC graduation and the post 2015 agenda around the SDGs. In that context I would like to express my
appreciation for the continuing generous commitment of Luxembourg to finance support to the Round Table process.

In conclusion, I hope that by highlighting the progress made and new aspects arising in respect of our cooperation in some of the action points from last year’s meeting, you will be encouraged today to offer your concrete suggestions on how we can collectively further improve implementation of our cooperation over the coming year.

Finally, let me express again my sincere appreciation to be in this meeting and to be co-chairing with the Minister. I appreciate your patience in listening to me, thank you for your participation today, and I look forward to a productive meeting.

Thank you.  Khob Chai Lai Lai.