Opening address
by

H.E Mr. Bouasone Bouphavanh, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR and Chairman of the National Steering Committee for the Round Table Process, the Millennium Development Goals and National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy

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- **Dr. Hafiz Pasha, Assistant Administrator and Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP**
- **Excellencies**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be invited to open this 9th Round Table Meeting today. This is the third time that the Lao PDR has organized this important Round Table Meeting in Vientiane.

First of all, I would like to extend a warm welcome and my sincere thanks to all the delegates from friendly countries, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Representatives of the International Organizations and all other distinguished delegates attending this important meeting.

I would like to extend my special thanks to Dr Hafiz Pasha, United Nations Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, for his time and participation as the co-chairman of this meeting.

Distinguished delegates,

Since the 8th Round Table Meeting held in August, 2003, the Government of the Lao PDR has received about US$ 1,153 million in assistance from friendly countries and international organizations, of which more than half or US$ 669 million is in grant aid and about US$ 484 million in concessional loans.

We have utilized these funds with domestic resource contributions to implement the Annual Socio-Economic Development Plans, under the Fifth Five-Year Plan on Socio-Economic Development; achieving several key results as reflected in the GDP growth rate of 7.5 percent in 2005-06, with the per capita income reaching US$ 500; eradicating opium cultivation, and reducing the slash and burn cultivation areas by 7,000 ha and 22,400 ha. remained to be reduced. The improvements in other socio-economic development indicators illustrate the continued sustainable development of Laos.

On another front, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has taken a number of steps forward to make the country more democratic under the rule of law. In addition, the country has met its obligation as a member of the international community and has actively worked to contribute to the regional and international affairs.

These achievements will create a fundamental base for the Lao People's Democratic Republic to maintain stability on the political and social-economic development fronts which are the good enabling conditions to attract more foreign investment and become a strong base to support the growth of the country.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen

Simultaneous with the implementation of the Fifth Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan during the past three years, the Government of the Lao PDR has also studied and drafted the Sixth Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010) through a highly participatory process; and the Plan was adopted by our National Assembly in June 2006.

The Sixth Five-Year National Socio Economic Development Plan will play a vital role in achieving the overall targets outlined in the ten-year Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2001-2010) approved by the 7th Party Congress in 2001 and reaffirmed by the 8th Party Congress earlier this year. The Sixth Plan is a break-through plan for creating the strong fundamentals to boost the nation's status in the regional and international arenas. It also substantially incorporated the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy and its goals coincide with the MDGs and those in the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries. In implementing the plan, the Government of the Lao PDR will firstly concentrate all work on (i) integrated rural development projects to eradicate poverty; (ii) develop the private sector and promote trade as much as possible; and (iii) utilize the Official Development Assistance in a more effective and efficient manner within the overall framework of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The overall directions for the Sixth Plan include transforming the multi-sectoral economy from uneven performance to fast and stable development within the market mechanisms guided by the State. The main focus areas are: promoting economic development, with human development as a key vehicle; utilizing comparative advantages to develop the country based on the sustainable development, long term and high effective directions; with the principles and targets balancing between economic growth, social development and environmental protection. The main social objective is to address poverty and help keep the socio-political situation stable.

Excellencies
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and gentlemen

It would not have been possible to succeed in achieving the advances in socio-economic development without the material and moral support and assistance from the international community. On this occasion, I take the opportunity on behalf of the Lao Government and the people to express our gratitude and thanks to all friendly countries and International Organizations for their support to the Lao PDR in various forms.

Looking ahead, the successful implementation of the Sixth Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) is critical for our country to leave the Least Developed Country status by 2020 through the process of industrialization and modernization. The important challenges for ensuring the successful implementation of the Sixth Five-Year Plan include good and appropriate plans including an investment plan and a human resource development plan.

Distinguished guests,

While all of us can be very proud of the past achievements, we realize that a number of difficulties lie ahead of us. These include the education of the people for capital accumulation is not strong; the human resource development is below target; the elaboration of the national programme into priority projects is still slow and not fully responsive to the needs on the ground; the application of advanced technology and modern equipment in production and in improving the living conditions of the people is still extended slowly. In addition, the coordination and monitoring works are not strengthened and need to be improved in the future.

So, I hope this Ninth Round Table Meeting will provide a good opportunity to all participants to openly and constructively discuss and exchange views on the difficult issues and challenges and agree on possible solutions with the aim to help the Lao PDR reach its goals set out in the Sixth Five-Year Plan including the Poverty Reduction Strategy therein; and enable the nation to exist the Least Developed Country Status by 2020.

In order to meet the high efficiency of the guidance on elaboration of the Sixth Five-Year Plan and to improve the convenience for coordination with the partners in development, the Government of the Lao PDR has improved the structure of the National Steering Committee for the Roundtable Process; established the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Reduction; and appointed senior Government officials to be responsible for the Working Group to have regular discussions with the partners in development.

I hope this meeting will come up with the best ways to further the cooperation between the Government of the Lao PDR, and friendly countries and International Organizations through harmonisation and alignment within the framework of the Paris Declaration; and to make more effective use of aid to further the socio-economic development of the country.

Now, I declare the Ninth Round Table Meeting officially open.

Thank You