

Virtual Retreat on the Round Table Process

Vientiane, 8th October 2021 – Today, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, with the support of the United Nations in Lao PDR, and with logistical support from UNDP, held a virtual Retreat on the technical preparations for the upcoming 13th High-Level Roundtable Meeting (HL-RTM), which is scheduled for mid-November 2021. Currently taking place every five years, HL-RTMs provide inclusive forums to support the design and implementation of the country's national development plans.

The Retreat was co-chaired by Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment, H.E. Madame Phonevanh Outhavong, and UN Resident Coordinator to Lao PDR, Ms. Sara Sekkenes, and was attended by representatives from various line ministries and a wide array of development partners, including from the private sector and civil society.

Representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented preparations for the HL-RTM at the Retreat, which was an opportunity for relevant stakeholders to discuss the implementation of national development priorities outlined in the 9th NSEDP, including developing a COVID-19 recovery plan, as well as preparations for Lao PDR's graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. The Retreat also focused on the implementation arrangements of the 9th NSEDP, specifically, the monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as prompting discussions around options for the development of a practical and realistic financing strategy for the 9th NSEDP.

Other aspects of the upcoming HL-RTM which were discussed at the Retreat included conversations around progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the country and the achievements and challenges of the implementation of the 8th NSEDP, as well as discussions around the strengthening development cooperation through a proposed assessment of the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan, which was drafted to guide the implementation of Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

In her opening remarks, H.E. Madame Phonevanh Outhavong underlined the challenging situation the country faces, noting that the SDGs and their national expression and manifestation through the NSEDP set an ambitious development agenda, for which the world and the Asia-Pacific region, including Lao PDR, are already off-track. With the shock from COVID-19, and the looming triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, achieving these targets by 2030 will become even more challenging.

However, she also highlighted the need to adapt to the 'new normal', as COVID-19 is likely to remain an issue for years to come. Though a prioritisation is necessary, she noted, the Government of Lao PDR remains committed to the overall objectives of the plan, which are to continue efforts to realize the SDGs, whilst implementing the National Green Growth Strategy, paving the way to graduate from LDC status, and becoming an upper middle-income country.

United Nations Resident Coordinator to Lao PDR, Ms. Sara Sekkenes, also acknowledged the challenges facing Lao PDR, emphasizing that the pandemic has already exacerbated existing challenges facing the country. In this context, Ms. Sekkenes stressed the critical juncture at which Lao PDR finds itself, underscoring that during the period covered by the 9th NSEDP, Lao PDR will see windows of opportunity for transformative investments in human capital, regional integration, and the fight against climate change and environmental

degradation. Such investments are cornerstones for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable development pathway that leaves no one behind, she stated.

Despite the challenges, Ms. Sekkenes underscored that with dedication, perseverance, and creativity, the partners of the Round Table can work towards securing a successful development path which can further the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and beyond.

The Retreat is a part of the preparations for the HL-RTM and the MPI-MoFA Programme with the objective to contribute to the NSEDP Implementation towards LDC Graduation, Middle-Income-Country Transition and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with the generous support from the New Zealand Government, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and UNDP.

For more information, please contact:

Mr. Alounsith Maniphon, Director of International Organisations Division, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Email: alounsith.dic@gmail.com

Mobile: +856 (20) 5999 9153