

## High Level Round Table Meeting Press Conference

**Vientiane, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021** – Today, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, with support from the United Nations in Lao PDR, set out the plan for a series of consultations on crucial development issues building up to the 13<sup>th</sup> High-Level Round Table Meeting, scheduled for November 17<sup>th</sup>. [The Round Table will be attended by the highest level of Government in Lao PDR including H.E Mr. Phankham Viphavanh, Prime Minister of Lao PDR and will set the tone for development cooperation over the coming 5 years.

Her Excellency, Madame Phonevanh Outhavong, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment and Ms. Sara Sekkenes, UN Resident Coordinator to Lao PDR both explained how the Round Table will work towards improving development coordination in support of Lao PDR's development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Deputy Minister underscored the importance of the Round Table Meeting, noting that it will provide a great opportunity for the Government of Lao PDR to mobilise stakeholders on the development plans of the country by bringing together partners from the private sector, member states and organisations from the development community and civil society to both learn from previous challenges and successes and collaborate on the best way forward for the country over the duration of the 9<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

'We must adapt to the new normal', stated Madame Outhavong in relation to the impact of COVID-19 and, despite the difficult situation, she continued, the Government is committed to achieve the objectives of the 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

With Lao PDR set to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026, the High-Level Round Table Meeting will provide an important opportunity to agree approaches to work together for a smooth transition. The UN Resident Coordinator underscored that meeting all three criteria for graduation, is a 'landmark achievement' for Lao PDR, which shows how far the country has come, further noting that the Round Table will enable the Government and development partners to begin preparatory work to develop a 'smooth transition strategy' from LDC status. Ms. Sekkenes continued, noting that there are only six other countries that have graduated from LDC status and though an extremely positive achievement and steppingstone for further advancements, it will require careful planning and management to ensure that Lao PDR makes the most of the benefits, is prepared for the inevitable changes that graduation entails and continues on the road to become a middle-income country.

The High-Level Round Table Meeting is an opportunity to learn, share best practise and build on our achievements, by analysing where we are and what we can do to improve, taking into consideration the wide-ranging consequences of the pandemic. The continued success story of Lao PDR, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation, will only continue with an inclusive and collaborative approach to development, Ms. Sekkenes stated, underlining that the press conference is an important way for the general public and all stakeholders to be informed and involved in the development of the country's future.

Taking place every five years, High-Level Round Table Meetings provide an inclusive forum for the Government of Lao PDR, the United Nations and development partners to discuss and support the design and implementation of the country's national development plans and processes. There will be a series of pre-consultation meetings and side-events in the weeks leading into the Round Table on a variety of subjects relevant to national planning spanning

green growth, natural resources management, how to better deal with shocks such as the pandemic and climate change, food system sustainability, trade, health, education, financing for development, LDC graduation, macroeconomics, and the issue of unexploded ordnances, for which Lao PDR has its own unique Sustainable Development Goal No. 18, and much more.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Round Table Meeting will be a hybrid event, with most participants attending virtually and with only a few being able to join in person whilst following preventative measures and social distancing rules in line with the national COVID-19 regulations.

To keep updated on events such as these, the Round Table Meeting website: <https://rtm.org.la/> and follow: [insert: @GoL Social Media Account], UN in Lao PDR on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/UNLaos> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/UNinLaoPDR>

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