

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Lao PDR ‘extremely vulnerable’ to trafficking by transnational organized crime groups, says UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov**

Vientiane (Lao PDR) 5 December 2012 – Lao PDR’s position at the hub of the Greater Mekong Subregion and its shared borders with Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam make it “extremely vulnerable” to the trafficking of people, illicit drugs and commodities by transnational organized crime groups, warned Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the Vienna-based UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). He said this was true despite the country’s economic reforms, impressive economic growth rates and its efforts to combat corruption.

“While economic growth and regional integration bring many positives such as the increased mobility of goods, services, people and money, they also provide opportunities for transnational organized crime to expand, threaten human security and challenge the rule of law,” said Mr. Fedotov.

“Transnational organized criminal syndicates traffic in illicit drugs, children, women and men, counterfeit products and fake medicines. But they also play a role in illicit resource extraction including protected natural resources, timber, fish and other wildlife. These syndicates represent a threat to public health and to society’s well-being,” said Mr. Fedotov. “Let’s put them out of business!”

In his first official visit, Mr. Fedotov met with H. E. Thongsing Thammavong, the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, H.E. Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Security, Dr. Thongban Seng-Aphone and Mr. Kou Chansina, Acting Chair of the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision. He also met with victims of human trafficking and university students.

Mr. Fedotov thanked the Government for its annual contribution to UNODC’s annual South-East Asia Opium Survey. He reiterated UNODC Lao PDR Country Programme’s continued support to Government efforts to reduce illicit opium poppy cultivation and to increase food security, as well as develop sustainable livelihoods in former opium-growing areas, and to fight illicit drugs, organized crime, corruption, terrorism, and the trafficking of people and sexual exploitation of minors.

During a visit to the UNODC-supported Counseling and Protection Centre for Women and Children, Mr. Fedotov cited it as a best practice. “We need more such shelters at a time when many of those in society are being victimized in this way,” he said.

Mr. Fedotov noted that the centre currently housed both women and children who had been victimized by human trafficking – as well as domestic violence and sexual exploitation. He commended police and prosecutors for focusing on victims and their human rights in their response to such crimes against children and women.

Mr. Fedotov also urged support for Project Childhood, an initiative to combat the sexual exploitation of children – mainly in the travel and tourism sectors – within the Greater Mekong subregion. The project is currently active in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam. Project Childhood is being implemented in two complementary pillars – the Protection Pillar, a partnership between UNODC and [Interpol](#), and its sister arm, the Prevention Pillar, implemented by [World Vision](#).

While Project Childhood (Prevention Pillar) aims to work with communities to prevent children from becoming victims of sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, Project Childhood (Protection Pillar) strengthens law enforcement capacity to identify, arrest and prosecute travelling child sex offenders in the Mekong region.

In other meetings, Mr. Fedotov congratulated the Government for significant seizures of illicit drugs in the last few years, and strongly emphasized the need for an effective community-based approach to drug abuse and HIV prevention. Such an approach should be evidence-based and supportive of human rights.

For further information, please contact:

John Bleho,
Media and Communications Consultant,
UNODC Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific
Telephone: (+66) 2288.2091
Mobile: (+66) 81.750.0539
Email: [john.bleho\[at\]unodc.org](mailto:john.bleho@unodc.org)

David Dadge
Spokesperson, UNODC Vienna
Telephone: (+43 1) 26060-5629
Mobile: (+43-699) 1459-5629
Email: [david.dadge\[at\]unvienna.org](mailto:david.dadge@unvienna.org)