

**Workshop on Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism:
Situation and Responses in the Mekong Sub-region**

Opening Remarks

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Excellency Prof. Ket Kiettisak, Vice-Minister, Minister of Justice,

Excellency Mrs. Lynda Worthaisong, Australian Ambassador, Australian Embassy Lao DR,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Office on Drugs Crime (UNODC), it is my honor to welcome you to this workshop titled *Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism: Situation and Responses in the Mekong Sub-region*. I would especially like to welcome delegates from Cambodia, Thailand, Viet Nam and the Australian Federal Police and participants from the Lao PDR Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Justice, who have come here today to share their knowledge and experience.

A very warm welcome also to the donor for Project Childhood – AusAID, represented here today by Ms. Pitchanuch Supavanich from AusAID Bangkok.

Importantly, this workshop will not have been possible without the initiative of the newly established Committee responsible for drafting legislation, and the participation of all concerned government agencies. These agencies include Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Public Security, the Office of People's Supreme Prosecutor, People's Supreme Court, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism and many others.

Distinguished participants,

Your participation shows strong commitment and encouraging efforts in dealing with sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. On behalf UNODC, we are proud to be a part of these efforts and happy to provide assistance and cooperation to the Lao government in responding to child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Child sexual exploitation exists everywhere in the world and Laos is not an exception. While Lao is opening up its borders in order to integrate itself in the region with the ASEAN Economic Community, these opportunities will of course come with challenges. One of those challenges is transnational crime, which includes child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. As a tourism destination, Lao PDR continues to attract tourists. I believe that amongst these tourists, there will be some travelling child sex offenders, who will seek to exploit children in the countries that lack comprehensive legal frameworks that will make them accountable for crimes against children.

The discussions today are very significant in sharing experiences within and across borders, and in particular, in capturing lessons learned from Lao PDR's neighboring countries. The workshop will also assess the Lao legal framework with the objective of possible legal reform as appropriate. This work will be very vital to building a platform and foundation in dealing with crimes against children, and will put Lao PDR in a better position to prevent the child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism before it accelerates to a bigger problem.

I congratulate the initiative of the Ministry of Justice and its counterparts in leading on the legal reform task identified and supported by Project Childhood (Protection Pillar). From reports received from the project team, I believe this work is evolving and I look forward to hearing positive results in due course. In this regard I also would like to wish the Committee responsible for Drafting Legislation regarding Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, success in their future work with the project team. We hope your efforts will continue and we look forward to our cooperation in working towards the protection of children sexually exploited and abused in Lao PDR and in the Mekong Sub-region.

On behalf of UNODC and the Project Childhood team, I would like to thank H.E. Prof. Ket Kietisak, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Justice and all members of Responsible Committee for organizing this important workshop. We also extend our deepest appreciation to AusAID for generously supporting the activities of Project Childhood in Lao PDR including the other project countries of Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

I wish you all a successful workshop, good health and positive progress in your respective duties.

Thank you.