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## **Laotian Government Presses Ahead with Land Policy; Signals Commitment to Strengthening Policy Implementation and Securing Rights of Local Communities**

***As major international conference opens in Lao PDR, high-level government leaders commit to implement large-scale land reform***

**VIENTIANE, LAO PDR** (28 August 2012)—During a riveting keynote speech given at an international land and forestry conference in Vientiane today, Dr. Souvanhpheng Boupphanouvong, the President of the Committee on Economy, Planning and Finance of the National Assembly of Lao PDR, announced the government’s intention to undergo a nationwide formal process of large scale land reform, and prioritize enhanced effectiveness of land policy implementation and the need for increased local land management, given that access to land for rural households is fundamental to sustained poverty alleviation.

“For over a year, Lao has been undergoing a process of reviewing and revising various policies and legislation pertaining to land and natural resources. What we’ve learned from countries across the world is that a sound policy framework must be coupled with equally sound and effective policy implementation. Also, by ensuring local peoples’ rights to the land they live and work on, we’ll be able to secure equitable distribution of benefits.” said Dr. Souvanhpheng Boupphanouvong to the global audience at the Workshop on International Knowledge Sharing and Learning hosted by the National Assembly of Lao PDR in cooperation with the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and RECOFTC-The Center for People and Forests in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on August 28-29, 2012. The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. Saysomphone Phomvihane, Vice President of the National Assembly.

“A new national land policy is a priority in Laos,” Dr. Boupphanouvong added. “Competition for land among various sectors is intensifying, and as a nation, we must act to prevent conflicts and ensure that the increasingly scarce land resource is developed in a way that contributes to national development goals and alleviates poverty among the rural population.”

The government organization responsible for developing the new Land Use Policy is the new Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) working together with the Lao National Assembly. They are committed to conduct the process in close collaboration with other relevant sectors, as well as the civil society and community groups.

Mr. James Bampton, Program Director of RECOFTC noted how seriously the government is taking the land rights issue.

“We all heard Dr. Boupphanouvong say that what is needed now are policies and laws that prevent land disputes and enhance livelihoods in an equitable manner,” said Mr. Bampton. “The high level people in this room suggest that this is now a true priority for Lao PDR. This is something that all stakeholders in the land sector, in particular the villagers, have been waiting for, and hopefully, will soon benefit from.”

Participants from more than eleven countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe shared their experiences, suggesting that granting greater control to local forest communities has been a key element in the turn-around accomplished by many of these countries, including China, South Korea, Mexico, Sweden, Nepal, Vietnam and Norway.

“Lao PDR is the latest in a series of countries around the world that are realizing the fundamental role of local control and improved forest governance in alleviating poverty, expanding legal and sustainable land management, and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation” said Arvind Khare, Executive Director of the Rights and Resources Group, the nonprofit coordinating mechanism of the Rights and Resources Initiative. “[RRI’s research](#) and firsthand experience in other nations suggests that if Lao PDR does as it says it will do, it will slow the unsustainable use of the nations’ lands and unleash the entrepreneurial energy of Lao villagers whose capacity to maintain and benefit from the use of the land they live on is currently restricted because of shortcomings in the legal framework and its implementation.”

In her keynote address, Dr. Souvanhpheng Boupphanouvong said that “the government will now move immediately to creating a sound policy and legal framework where the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved in land use and development are clearly defined. Subsequently, the focus will shift to improving the effectiveness of policy implementation. Securing villagers’ rights and ensuring that they receive a fair share of the benefits of land development is another key issue to be tackled.”

“This represents a major improvement in our policies toward land rights and local management,” said Dr. Akhom Tounalom, Vice Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, in his remarks to an audience comprised of researchers, high level government officials, policymakers, international experts on forestry and land reform, and community leaders from across Asia, Africa and Latin America. “Our current policies and their implementation are not sufficient to ensure that we can meet our goals in terms of poverty eradication, economic growth, food security and climate change.”

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### **The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)**

The Rights and Resources Initiative is a global coalition of international, regional, and community organizations advancing forest tenure, policy and market reforms. RRI leverages the strategic collaboration and investment of its Partners and Collaborators around the world by working together on research, advocacy and convening strategic actors to catalyze change on the ground.

RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit [www.rightsandresources.org](http://www.rightsandresources.org).

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