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in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**

Replies of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the list of issues in relation to its initial report*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

A. General Information

1. The rights enshrined under the ICESCR are essential to ensuring access to adequate food, clean water, healthcare, housing, education, employment, and cultural participation. These rights also encompass the right to participate in economic and social development, sustainable management of natural resources and the environment, and access to public health services and investment opportunities. To ensure the full realization of these rights, the Lao Government is committed to raising public awareness of relevant laws, legislation, and measures aimed at elevating accepted legal standards. These rights are guaranteed and implemented through various provisions of the Constitution and laws, such as the Law on Health Protection, Law on Food, Law on Education, Law on Labour, and Law on Environmental Protection. Furthermore, these rights are integrated into the national education system from primary to higher education, to promote understanding and compliance across the country.
2. Lao PDR has established 3 National Coordinating Mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights, designed to align with the country's specific context and practical realities. These mechanisms monitor the fulfilment of the rights and obligations of the Lao multi-ethnic people as enshrined in the Constitution, national laws and other legal frameworks, while also ensuring compliance with international human rights treaties to which the Lao PDR is party. These mechanisms include the National Committee on Human Rights, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mother and Child, and the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities. Lao PDR is not yet ready to establish national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles, instead, Lao PDR continues to focus on strengthening its existing mechanisms to fulfil its human rights obligations. This approach is considered more appropriate for the current national context. However, Lao PDR remains open to collaboration and exchange of experiences and best practices with other countries' national human rights institutions.
3. Lao PDR has issued operation permit (OP) to a total of 148 international non-Governmental organizations (INGOs) to operate within the country, in line with the policy set forth in the Decree on Non-Governmental Organizations No 13/PM, dated January 8, 2010. this Decree is currently being revised to better reflect the evolving socio-economic development conditions of the Lao PDR. In addition, the Lao PDR has a growing number of registered non-profit associations and foundations, governed by the Decree on Association no. 238/GOV, dated August 11, 2017, and the Decree on Foundation no. 149/PM, dated November 19, 2011. As of now, there are 309 registered organizations, comprising 245 non-profit associations and 64 foundations. Likewise, Decree No. 238 and Decree No. 149 are also under revision to meet the ensuring needs in the country.
4. Lao PDR is actively engaged in studying international best practices and exchanging knowledge with a view to possible formulation of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in the future. This initiative aims to harmonize national legal frameworks with the relevant international standards. Special attention is being given to improving the law enforcement, comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment for large-scale investment projects and ensuring adequate compensation for individuals affected by these projects. Additionally, efforts are being made to address past challenges related to the protection of individual rights and human rights in the context of development. These initiatives aim to ensure transparency in business operations, both in the private and public sectors, and to integrate economic, social, and cultural rights into business practices by embedding these rights into national work plans, programs, projects, and activities.
5. The Lao Government has approved several large-scale investment projects, including notable developments such as the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy hydroelectric project in Attapeu province, the Laos-China Railway Project, the Nam Theun 1 and 2 hydroelectric projects, the Nam Ngum 2-5 hydroelectric projects, the Hongsa coal-fired power plant, and mining operations at Xepon and Phu Bia as well as in recent years the Luang Prabang upstream Mekong River hydroelectric project and other hydro-wind and hydro-solar power projects. For each of these projects, the Lao PDR has prioritized the application of laws, regulations, and measures aligned with human rights and environmental principles norms and standards. This includes comprehensive engagement with local communities, ensuring inclusive

participation of both men and women from diverse ethnic groups, and conducting thorough environmental impact assessments prior to project execution. To support this effort, specific work plans and activities have been developed for each project to ensure that affected individuals and communities not only receive fair and transparent treatment but also experience improvements in their living standards. These measures include: 1) resettlement and relocation; 2) infrastructure development; 3) improvements in living standards, including access to healthcare, education, and social services; and 4) advocacy and fair compensation.

6. Lao PDR attaches its importance on assessing the impact of climate change on economic, social and cultural rights, particularly concerning individuals, and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, women, and children. In this context, the National Climate Change Strategy of 2010 was revised and transformed into the National Strategy for Addressing Climate Change by 2030, formalized under Decree No. 98/No, dated 24 February 2023. This strategy aligns with the National Plan for Addressing Climate Change, adopted on 9 March 2021, and reflects evolving national and international contexts. Key legislative and policy measures include the 2024 Law on Environmental Protection, the Strategy for Natural Resources and the Environment by 2030, which is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the National Green Growth Strategy. Furthermore, the Climate Change Decree No. 321/GOV, dated 18 September 2019, the Law on Disaster Management, and Decree on the Organization and Operation of the Disaster Management Committee, No. 239/PM, dated 18 May 2020, further strengthen the country's climate resilience framework. Currently, the Decree on the Organization and Operation of the Climate Change Management Committee is being revised, aiming to mitigate global warming and its effects on economic, social, and cultural rights, including public health, livelihoods, infrastructure, and the environment.

7. The National Plan for Addressing Climate Change, adopted on March 9, 2021, plays a vital role in aligning Lao PDR's climate actions with the 1st Decision of the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This plan builds on the previous National Plan submitted by Lao PDR to the UNFCCC Secretariat on September 30, 2015, demonstrating the country's commitment to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, which it ratified on September 7, 2016.

8. The National Plan for Addressing Climate Change has been elevated to a more ambitious framework, setting three primary objectives for managing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions: comparative GHG reductions, clear targets for emission cuts, and achieving significant reductions by 2030. The plan further outlines the Lao PDR's commitment to achieving Net Zero Emissions by 2050. This upgraded approach broadened the scope to include additional sectors and strengthens emission reduction goals. The Plan, also added content on transparency and consistency among the targets, short-term objectives on adapting to new climate change to conform to the measurement, reporting and verification (MRV), including showing intention of the Lao PDR's voluntary cooperation to increase its targets in implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This also highlights Lao PDR's voluntary cooperation and commitment to raising its targets, in accordance with the Paris Agreement on climate change.

9. The measures outlined in the National Plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change are aligned with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, particularly the goal of "limiting global average temperature increases to below 2 degrees Celsius, with an aim to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial level." This 2021 National Plan is integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is embedded into the Ninth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021–2025), which emphasizes the importance of adapting to the impacts of climate change as a key element of national development.

B. Issues Relating to the General Provisions of the Covenant (Articles 1–5)

Article 1 (2)

Right to freely dispose of natural wealth and resources

10. Lao PDR has consistently promoted and managed both domestic and foreign investments, ensuring that the process is efficient, transparent, and fair, while safeguarding the rights and legitimate benefits of all stakeholders—investors, the State, communities, and citizens. These efforts aim to integrate the national economy into regional and international frameworks, contributing to the National Socio-Economic Development, fostering continuous sustainable and green growth strategy ensuring that all Lao multi-ethnic groups have access to housing, food security, stable employment, social security, and public order. As part of its development strategy, the Lao PDR is fostering rural transformation, turning small villages into towns, and promoting the nation’s rich cultural heritage. The state also prioritizes the protection and equitable use of natural resources in an effective, transparent, and equitable manner, with active community participation in decision-making processes. Key legislation, including laws on land, water resources, forests, land allocation, investment promotion, and environmental protection, serves as vital tools for governance and sustainable development.

11. In 2022–2023, the Lao Government undertook extensive dissemination advocacy to promote awareness of key laws and regulations related to environmental and natural resource management, including Law on Forests, the Law on Aquatic Animals and Wildlife, Prime Minister’s Order No. 05/PM, dated May 8, 2015, Prime Minister’s Order No. 15/PM, dated May 13, 2016, and Ministerial Decision No. 1858/MAF, dated May 12, 2021. A total of 402 dissemination sessions were conducted across the country, reaching 8,670 participants. Of these, six sessions at the central level involved 258 participants, while 396 sessions at the local level, engaged 8,412 participants.

12. Following the approval and official promulgation of the Law on Resettlement and Vocation, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has actively worked on dissemination of this legislation to various target groups. The Ministry has collaborated with relevant sectors to raise awareness of the law at both central and local levels. The implementation of this law has yielded significant improvements in resettlement and vocation within both designated and general areas, exceeding initial expectations. Notably, the movement and relocation of citizens have steadily declined, ensuring that rural communities enjoy stable and secure housing, access to productive land, sustainable employment, and improved living standards. From 2021 to the present, the implementation efforts have facilitated the resettlement of housing to 496 families: 425 in designated areas and 71 in general areas. Additionally, 352 families have been granted productive land, all within designated areas. Furthermore, 43,039 families have been organized into various professions, with 1,831 families in designated areas and 41,208 families in general areas. Despite these advances, there remain several unresolved challenges that require ongoing attention and effective resolution such as the need to improve local governance and service delivery in certain areas, adequate living conditions, sufficient access to productive land, and reliable water supply system.

13. In the assessment phase of environmental impacts for large-scale investment projects, a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is mandated as outlined in Section 2 of Decree No. 389/PM, issued on October 20, 2022. All investment projects or activities necessitating an EIA must comply with Section 3 of the Ministerial Decision on Enhancing the Classification of Investment Projects or Activities within the Environmental Impact Assessment framework, as specified in No. 0358/MONRE, dated February 24, 2023. For industrial factory investment initiatives, it is essential to prioritize environmental protection and preservation, as detailed in Section 6, Articles 25 and 26 of the Law on Industrial Factories.

14. The Law on Investment Promotion has established a framework for facilitating both domestic and foreign investments in the Lao PDR. The Department of Investment Promotion, Ministry of Planning and Investment has been instrumental in disseminating the law,

publishing 5,000 copies in both Lao and English for widespread distribution throughout the country. Additionally, the Department has organized collaborative meetings with various ministries and international organizations to discuss investment opportunities and challenges. Moreover, comprehensive information regarding the law and investment policies has been made accessible through the Lao Official Gazette's official website as well as the Department's platform. This comprehensive approach has significantly enhanced the investment climate, fostering synergy between the state and private sectors and contributing to the national socio-economic development. Significant progress has been made, particularly in large-scale projects within the electricity and mining sectors. These initiatives have spurred infrastructure development and bolstered economic integrity and connectivity, both regionally and internationally. Key projects such as the Laos-China Railway and the Vientiane-Vangvieng highway have emerged as crucial drivers of economic activity, facilitating the production and distribution of goods and services as well as tourism. Despite facing significant challenges, including the current global economic landscape and the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lao PDR continues to show a positive growth trajectory. From 2016 and 2023, the country approved 698 investment projects, attracting a total investment of \$27.5 billion. However, various issues persist, particularly concerning the approval process for new projects. Delays often arise from the need to secure land guarantees, and some investment proposals are fragmented, circumventing the established one-stop center. Furthermore, the management of investments has not consistently met expectations, resulting from a lack of systematic monitoring and oversight due to budget limitations and inadequate resources.

Article 2 (1)

Available resources

15. The outstanding outcomes of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020) are but not limited to:

- Enhanced Continuous political stability, peace and order in society. Modernised public administrative system, rule of law, and equitable and fair society;
- Significant milestone in leading the country towards graduation from Least Developed Country status (meeting two of the three LDC graduation criteria: per capita GNI of USD 1,996 and the Human Asset Index value of 72.8);
- The implementation of the SDGs and the Government's Green Growth Strategy;
- The development of infrastructure and economic corridors for regional and international connectivity such as the Laos-China Railway Project and the Vientiane-Vangvieng expressway;
- Improvement in the promotion and attraction of private investment. Strengthening micro, small, and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), the growth of the processing industry including the production of construction materials, textiles, beverages, mineral products, and wood products.

16. The mid-term implementation of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan has recorded significant achievements, such as:

- The country continues to have strong political stability, peaceful and orderly society, the administrative system has stepped into the law and is more modern, the society has more and more equal and fair;
- The basis of production and service continues to be developed, and a number of new sectors have emerged, such as the production of plants and livestock as foods and export goods, in which gradually drives economic recovery and continues to grow; management of income, expenditure, and currency has gradually been improved, the important thing is that the country's economy does not fall into crisis;
- Many laws and legislation under the law have been revised and developed, which have become important tool for the organization of the democratic political system; Improving the organizational structure, and service-investment of all economic

sectors related to the state-social management by the laws have progressively been improved and more actively transformed.

17. In 2023, the Lao PDR made significant strides in poverty alleviation, with 1,026,083 families, representing 83.13% of poor families, were successfully lifted out of poverty; while 208,231 families (16.87%) remain classified as poor. The efforts to strengthen ‘developed-family’ status yielded positive outcomes, with 841,454 families (68.17%) reporting improved living conditions. Village development initiatives exceeded expectations, with 2,828 villages (33.66%) achieving significant progress. Additionally, 31 large villages successfully transitioned to urban status, and 9 districts attained comprehensive strength, representing 6.08% of all districts nationwide. In terms of resettlement and housing, 496 families were allocated residences, surpassing the initial target of 141 families. Land allocation for productive use reached 352 families, exceeding the target of 222 families. Job creation initiatives resulted in 43,039 individuals finding stable employment, well above the target of 20,000. Looking ahead, the gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to grow by 4.2% within the year 2024.

18. The enforcement of laws upholds the principle of equality before the law, ensuring that tax obligations are uniformly applied, regardless of an individual’s wealth or socio-economic status. This principle extends to both pre-tax and post-tax obligations, as well as customs duties. The financial policy designed to address the impacts of COVID-19 is anchored in the regulation framework established by the Ministry of Finance. Specifically, it is guided by the Ministerial Decision on budgetary policies aimed at the prevention, control and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, No. 2251/MoF, dated May 20, 2021.

19. Between 2019 and 2023, the Lao PDR implemented a comprehensive campaign to promote awareness of the Anti-Corruption Law across the nation. This initiative targeted a diverse audience, including civil servants, military and police officers, and the general public. In total, 153 outreach events were conducted, engaging 349,869 participants, of whom 14,511 were women. Throughout this period, 70 entities were subjected to inspections, resulting in the investigation of 18 cases of corruption. These efforts led to the identification of 464 individuals implicated in corrupt practices. Additionally, 380 administrative cases were resolved. Legal actions were taken against 84 individuals. Moreover, 62 cases were referred to the prosecutor’s office. The Prosecutor’s Office subsequently submitted cases against 37 individuals. Court rulings resulted in decisions against 34 individuals.

Article 2 (2)

Non-Discrimination

20. Currently, the Lao PDR does not have a dedicated anti-discrimination law that explicitly prohibits direct, indirect, and multiple forms of discrimination in all spheres. Nevertheless, the Government has adopted various policies aimed at promoting equality and addressing discrimination, by virtue of the Constitution and related legislation. Articles 8, 35, 37, and 42 of the Constitution affirm the state’s commitment to unity and equality among all ethnic groups, prohibiting any acts that create division or discrimination. The Constitution guarantees that all Lao citizens are equal before the law, regardless of gender, social status, education, beliefs, or ethnicity, and ensures equal rights for both men and women in political, economic, cultural, social, and family life. Moreover, it safeguards the inviolable rights to life, personal integrity, dignity, and shelter. In terms of legal provisions, Article 13 of the Law on Criminal Procedure reinforces the principle of equality before the law and the courts, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, economic or social status, language, education level, occupation, belief, or residence, are treated equally in criminal proceedings. The People’s Prosecutor Office, People’s Court, and Investigation Authority are mandated to ensure that all parties, including suspects, defendants, victims, and civil plaintiffs, can fully exercise their legal rights. These provisions are designed to guarantee that judicial processes are conducted fairly, impartially, and objectively.

21. The handling of legal claims, in accordance with the justice process, involves key authorities such as the Investigation Officers, the People’s Prosecutor Office, and the People’s Court. Remedial procedures are outlined in the Law on Civil Procedure, the Law on

Criminal Procedure, and other relevant laws and regulations. In terms of remedies and administrative assistance for victims, these are implemented through a comprehensive legal framework that includes the Law on Handling of Complaints, the Law on Monitoring of the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assemblies, the Law on Criminal Procedure, the Penal Code, and the Law on Combating and Preventing Violence Against Women and Children. Moreover, the Lao PDR is committed to providing comprehensive support to victims of violence by ensuring access to legal consultation, representation by a lawyer, or the appointment of legal guardians throughout judicial proceedings. In cases where language barriers exist, interpreters are provided to ensure effective communication. These measures are designed to protect the legitimate rights and interests of victims and to ensure justice to all without discrimination.

22. In responding to issue raised in this paragraph, Lao PDR wishes to refer to the Lao Government's reply letters to the Working Group on Communications and the Working Group on Situations of the United Nations Complaint Procedure, particularly the Letters No. 16/Lao.PM.GE.20, dated January 17, 2020; No. 112/Lao.PM.GE.20, dated August 04, 2020; No. 60/Lao.PM.GE.21, dated 27 May 2021; No. 158/Lao.PM.GE.21, dated October 01, 2021; No. 022/Lao.PM.GE.22, dated February 04, 2022; No. 181/Lao.PM.GE.22, dated August 30, 2022, and No. 201/Lao.PM.GE.22, dated September 16, 2022, and dated August 11, 2023. Furthermore, the Lao PDR would also like to refer to the Letter of the Working Group on Situations of the UN Complaint Procedure, No. G/SO 215/1 LAO 252, dated October 30, 2023, regarding the dismissal of its consideration of the communication in question.

Article 3

Gender Equality

23. The Government of the Lao PDR places a strong emphasis on promoting employment for its citizens, ensuring the compliance with both national laws and international labour standards, including ratification of many conventions under the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Government is dedicated to fostering a conducive working environment through the continuous development and revision of policies, legislation, and action plans that align with the country's evolving socio-economic needs. In line with this commitment, the Lao PDR enacted the Law on Labour, with the most recent amendments in 2014, and has ratified a total of 12 ILO conventions. Furthermore, the Government is in the process of introducing new legislation aimed at enhancing labour and social welfare systems, including the Law on Employment, the draft Law on Workforce Skills Development, and the draft Law on Social Work. It is also preparing amendments to the Law on Social Welfare and the Law on Labour to further strengthen workers' rights and social protections.

24. Over the past two years, the Government has made significant strides in fostering skills development across both public and private sectors, targeting individuals without vocational skills, those seeking career transitions, the unemployed, and those pursuing new employment opportunities. These initiatives align with national workforce standards encompassing 37 occupations and have been implemented through various institutions, skills development centers, and mobile training units, benefiting a total of 8,942 individuals (3,523 women), which represents 59.61% of the five-year plan target of 15,000 participants. This cohort includes 1,564 individuals (642 women) trained in the agricultural sector, 5,659 individuals (1,859 women) in the industrial sector, and 1,719 individuals (1,022 women) in the service sector. Furthermore, labour units have been actively encouraged to enhance skills development initiatives across diverse occupations, resulting in the training of 26,819 individuals, including 13,113 women. This achievement exceeds the five-year plan target by 7.28%, surpassing the initial goal of 25,000 individuals. Within this group, 8,684 individuals (4,683 women) received training in the agricultural sector, 12,596 individuals (5,578 women) in the industrial sector, and 5,539 individuals (2,852 women) in the service sector.

25. In addition, the Government is committed to addressing the gender pay gap, as evidenced by the implementation of various legislative measures aimed at promoting gender equality and enhancing workers' rights. These measures include the Labour Law, specifically Article 96, which ensures equality between women and men in the workplace. Furthermore,

the Prime Minister's Office Notice No. 1502/PM, dated August 16, 2023, outlines an adjustment to the minimum wage, raising it to 1,600,000 kip for all workers in Laos. Other significant initiatives include Decree No. 22/PM, dated February 5, 2019, which focuses on workplace safety and health, and Decree No. 245/PM, dated May 22, 2020, concerning the employment of Lao workers abroad. The Government has also completed the National Strategy and Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities and endorsed the National Strategy on Social Protection (No. 224/PM, dated April 1, 2020). Additionally, the Ministerial Decision on the Structure of Skills Development Standards and its Guidance has been implemented, along with the National Strategy for promoting rural employment, all aimed at creating equitable opportunities in rural areas.

26. The Government is committed to enhancing access to formal employment for women through a multifaceted approach. This includes promoting the role of both public and private educational institutions in providing technical and vocational training aligned with the objectives of the 5-Year Plan (2016–2020). During this period, a total of 419,264 individuals (184,556 women) received training, resulting in 120,497 individuals (47,354 women) entering the agricultural sector; 101,043 individuals (27,724 women) joining the industrial sector; and 197,724 individuals (109,478 women) employed in the service sector. Additionally, the Government actively encourages the labour force to engage in economic activities by supplying skilled workers to both domestic and international markets, culminating in a total employment figure of 559,533 individuals (243,120 women). The Government has also initiated a national strategy project aimed at promoting career development in rural areas, creating valuable opportunities for production and employment. This initiative has been implemented in two districts in Sekong province and is set to expand to two additional districts in Savannakhet province, with training provided for 296 individuals (71 women). To further enhance employment services, the Government is improving the employment service network at both central and provincial levels, ensuring efficient and accessible service delivery. Additionally, there is a concerted effort to promote adherence to labour laws through public awareness initiatives and regular inspections of labour units.

C. Issues relating to the specific provisions of the Covenant (Articles 6–15)

Article 6

Right to work

27. The Government has integrated the 5th Five-Year Labour and Social Welfare Development Plan (2016–2020) and the 6th Five-Year Labour and Social Welfare Development Plan (2021–2025) into the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021–2025). In accordance with the Law on Employment (Articles 33–37) and the Decree on Labour Market Information (No. 02/GOV, 2022), these frameworks establish a foundation for the implementation of labour market information systems by 2025. Currently, the Department of Employment within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is in the process of developing a comprehensive strategy for the labour market information system, which was scheduled to commence in mid-2024 and be completed by mid-2025. This initiative aims to enhance the policies and expand the labour market information framework, ensuring it is more extensive, efficient, and effective in generating employment opportunities that align with the needs of the domestic labour market. Furthermore, two existing Labour Market Information System websites have been consolidated into a single platform, transitioning from www.lmi.molsw.gov.la/index.php and www.pes.molsw.gov.la to the unified website at www.lmi.gov.la.

28. The Government of Lao PDR is dedicated to enhancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, guided by a robust policy framework aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity. As outlined in Article 4 of the Labour Management Law, the state prioritizes the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including the poor, disadvantaged, unemployed, and persons with disabilities. This policy framework ensures that these specific groups of people

have access to skills development programs and recruitment services, enabling them to secure employment, generate income, and receive fair treatment, ultimately contributing to the reduction of poverty. In support of this commitment, the Government has established vocational training programs tailored to the unique needs of persons with disabilities. This includes the creation of specialized vocational training centers and the adaptation of general training courses to enhance accessibility. Through these initiatives, persons with disabilities have received education and training in diverse fields, such as information technology, accounting, electrical repairs, bicycle maintenance, animal husbandry, and beauty services, among others, benefiting approximately 1,100 participants. Furthermore, the Government actively encourages both public and private sectors to integrate persons with disabilities into their workforce by creating inclusive employment opportunities in urban areas. This outreach has cultivated a greater understanding among employers regarding the capabilities and needs of individuals with disabilities. As a result of these efforts, 700 individuals with disabilities, including 200 women, have successfully gained employment in 230 enterprises, as reported in the CRPD-Lao PDR's Report 2017.

29. The 2022 labour force survey revealed that the total labour force in Lao PDR comprises approximately 5.3 million individuals aged 15 and older, with 2.5 million people actively participating in the labour market, representing 47.1% of the population in this age group. Among them, 2.47 million individuals are employed, accounting for 97.6% of the labour force, while 61,200 people are unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 2.4%. The employment is distributed across various sectors as follows: the agricultural sector employs 1.4 million individuals (56.8%), the industrial sector comprises 252,400 workers (10.2%), and the service sector includes 814,300 employees (32.9%).

Article 7

Right to just and favourable conditions of work

30. The implementation of the right to just and favourable conditions of work in Lao PDR is anchored in the Law on Labour, particularly in Chapter V, which addresses Labour Protection (Articles 51–65). This legal framework establishes the basis for employment contracts between employees and employers, ensuring mutual benefits while prohibiting discrimination. The Law on Labour also provides essential provisions for maintaining safe working environments and guarantees the timely payment of wages, encompassing both formal and informal workers, promoting effective management practices and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of all stakeholders in the labour market. Additionally, the Lao PDR has established regulations regarding hazardous and light work, explicitly prohibiting the employment of individuals under the age of 18 in hazardous conditions. Labour monitoring is conducted in accordance with these agreements to ensure compliance and uphold the rights of workers.

31. Labour inspections in the Lao PDR are integral to ensuring compliance with national policies, strategic frameworks, and legal regulations governing labour practices. These inspections encompass critical areas such as working conditions, employment contracts, internal regulations, wage structures, working hours, rest periods, overtime, occupational health and safety measures, and overall worker welfare. To strengthen these efforts, the Government has revised its Decision on the labour inspectors' appointment by extending number of labour inspectors to 159 in nationwide, including 32 women. As a result, a total of 2,493 regular inspections and 107 follow-up inspections were conducted across various sectors, including 680 units in industry, 295 in agriculture, and 1,625 in services. These inspections revealed 78,341 workers, with 28,397 women and 7,985 foreign workers (1,450 women). Among these workers, 41,234 had formal employment contracts (16,915 women), while 5,948 were without contracts (2,746 women). Additionally, there are domestic regulations in place for 1,300 units.

32. The health examination of workers in the Lao PDR is regulated by the Law on Labour, particularly Chapter VIII, which focuses on Labour Safety and Health, as well as the Decree on Labour Safety and Health, specifically Article 24, which addresses the health examination requirements for workers. These regulations form part of a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at enhancing occupational health and safety. Currently, five designated health

examination centers – Mahosot Hospital, Setthatilath Hospital, Friendship Hospital, Kasemlath Hospital, and Laksai Hospital – operate within the economic zone. Over the past year, these facilities have conducted a total of 55 health examinations for workers, serving 20,183 individuals, including 6,911 women.

Article 8

Rights of Trade Unions

33. The Lao PDR has adopted laws and sub-laws to safeguard workers' rights, including the Law on Labour, the Law on Lao Trade Union, and the Law on Investment Promotion. These legal frameworks ensure that workers have the right to establish and join Lao Trade Union.

34. The Law on Lao Trade Unions, in Article 2, defines Lao Trade Union as mass organizations that represent and protect the legitimate rights and interests of trade union members, as well as workers and employees, both within and outside of labour units. As such, Lao Trade Unions are empowered to establish and expand their membership in labour units across various sectors. Furthermore, Article 166 of the Law on Labour stipulates that labour units with ten or more employees are required to have either employee representatives or a trade union in place. Article 60 grants both employees and employers the right to apply for membership in the Lao Trade Union and to appoint representatives within the labour unit or workplace. In addition, Article 87 outlines specific situations where employment contracts cannot be terminated, particularly in Paragraph 3, for employee representatives or heads of trade unions within the labour unit. In such cases, if an employer wishes to terminate the contract, they must first seek approval from the Labour Administration Agency.

35. In promoting collective bargaining, Article 165 of the Law on Labour outlines the rights and responsibilities of the Lao Trade Union, particularly in Paragraph 3, the rights to participate in the creation of labour contracts and engage in collective negotiations. This provision ensures that both parties – the employees and the employers – can protect and promote their respective rights and interests. In support of this, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions has issued Decision No. 638/SC, dated 31 May 2023, approving the revised draft collective labour contract. The new version is simplified while still ensuring that employees' rights and benefits exceed those provided by the existing legislation. Furthermore, Notice No. 648/OFFICE, dated 5 June 2023, provides guidelines for utilizing the new draft collective labour contract and promotes negotiations for the creation of such contracts within labour units, as well as in groups, associations, and cooperatives.

36. From 2023 to June 2024, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions has made significant strides in organizing and promoting labour unions both within and outside formal labour units. A key initiative has been encouraging informal workers to form groups, resulting in the establishment of 85 groups, comprising a total of 3,205 members, of whom 1,267 are women. Notably, five grassroots groups have been organized, totalling 226 members, with 187 of these being women. Additionally, 16 groups have been successfully integrated into the social security system, covering 103 members, including 60 women. In the formal business sector, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions has actively promoted the creation of collective labour contracts across 46 labour units, benefiting a total of 6,786 employees, of whom 4,872 are women.

Article 9

The right to social security

37. Between 2020 and 2022, the National Social Security Organisation (NSSO) implemented a policy to provide sickness and unemployment benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic, supporting a total of 94,438 individuals, of whom 61,101 were women. This initiative disbursed a total of 88.25 billion kip, significantly contributing to enhancing social stability, and fostering confidence among workers during economic hardships. In terms of social security coverage, data from 2023 indicates that the NSSO has extended coverage to 11.55% of the population, encompassing spouses and children of the insured, a total of

876,277 individuals, including 446,340 women. This coverage is distributed across the Government sector, with 493,841 insured individuals (255,340 women), and the private sector, with 373,436 insured individuals (191,008 women). Currently, the social security system covers 353,692 insured individuals (172,681 women), which represents 4.71% of the total population in 2023. This includes 174,510 individuals (82,864 women) in the Government sector, 152,659 individuals (77,515 women) in the private sector, and 26,793 voluntary insured individuals (12,302 women).

Article 10

Protection of the family and children

38. The Government prioritizes on combating trafficking in persons, particularly in the areas of labour exploitation and sexual exploitation. To address these challenges, the Government has established comprehensive policies, national action plans, and legal frameworks, including Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons, Law on Labour, Law on Employment, Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, Law on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Children, and Law on Gender Equality. Additionally, regulatory measures such as the Decree on Special Economic Zones, the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2021–2025, the Plan of Action on Gender Equality 2021–2025, the National Plan of Action on Preventing Violence Against Women and Children 2021–2025, and the Ministerial Decision on the prohibition of child labour further reinforce national efforts. These measures are complemented by guidelines for the protection, support, and referral of victims of trafficking, as well as protocols for assisting victims in reintegrating with their families and communities. Minimum standards for the protection and assistance of victims housed in shelters have also been developed, ensuring comprehensive care for survivors.

39. Lao PDR has established the National Committee on Anti-Human Trafficking, along with provincial and municipal committees, tasked with addressing trafficking in all its forms. Regionally and internationally, Lao PDR collaborates with key partners and is a party to important treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), its Optional Protocols, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which supplements the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. Moreover, Lao PDR has ratified key ILO Conventions reaffirming its commitment to international labour standards. In its regional efforts, Lao PDR collaborates with neighbouring countries to strengthen cross-border efforts in combating trafficking in persons, and in providing assistance and protection to victims.

40. In addition, the management of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Lao PDR has implemented key protective measures through the establishment of the Special Economic Zone Public Security Command and Labour Office. These entities are stationed within the SEZs to address issues related to human trafficking, forced labour, and other labour-related concerns. Their responsibilities include the registration of both Lao and foreign workers, regular inspections of labour practices within various units, and monitoring activities to combat forced prostitution, pornography, and other violations of the laws of the Lao PDR.

41. The Government has been striving to address the persistent issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) remnants in the Lao PDR, with a particular emphasis on providing assistance and enhancing rehabilitation services for the victims, including children affected by these dangerous remnants of war. Furthermore, the Government recognizes the significance of addressing cluster munitions for achieving SDG 18, particularly Goal 18, which seeks to ensure “Lives Safe from Unexploded Ordnance.” This goal underscores the urgency of resolving UXO-related challenges in the country. To facilitate these efforts, the Government has developed a comprehensive work plan aimed at addressing the impacts of unexploded ordnance, which includes the following initiatives:

42. The Government of the Lao PDR has integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeting the issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) into its National Socio-Economic Development Plan. This comprehensive approach includes raising awareness about the

consequences and origins of UXO, aiming to reach 3,000 villages and extend the UXO curriculum to 500 educational institutions, with an aim of reducing casualties to fewer than 40 individuals annually. Additionally, non-technical surveys will identify confirmed UXO locations in 2,776 villages, while technical surveys will delineate Confirmed Hazardous Areas covering 250,000 hectares, averaging 25,000 hectares per year. The Government plans to clear 50,000 hectares of agricultural land, community areas, and economic centers from unexploded ordnance, aiming for an average clearance of 10,000 hectares each year. Furthermore, comprehensive assistance will be provided to 5,750 victims of UXO, including medical treatment, psychological support, vocational training, and employment opportunities, with specific targets of medical treatment for 250 individuals, psychological support for another 250, healthcare and rehabilitation for 750, vocational training for 2,000, and raising awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities for 2,500 individuals. These initiatives reflect the Government's commitment to promoting human rights and ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens within the framework of sustainable development.

43. The 5th Five-Year Labour and Social Welfare Development Plan (2021–2025) has established clear targets for addressing the challenges posed by UXO and has identified key areas of focus for risk education, victim assistance, surveys, and the clearance and destruction of the UXO in designated priority zones. Complementing this effort, the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021–2030) emphasizes the promotion and development of individuals with disabilities, including those who have been victims of unexploded ordnance. This plan aims to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to essential socio-economic services through the enhancement of their surrounding environment and the effective enforcement of relevant policies, laws, and regulations.

44. Malaria has been a longstanding public health challenge in the Lao PDR, paralleling challenges faced by other countries in the Mekong River region. Presently, the disease remains prevalent in certain areas of southern Lao PDR, particularly where communities have close ties to their natural environments, such as in dense forested regions. The incidence of malaria is especially high among mobile populations, including those engaged in harvesting forest products, shifting cultivation, agricultural activities, hydroelectric project construction, mining, and border security. In light of this, the Lao Government, particularly through the Ministry of Health, is dedicated to prioritizing malaria control efforts aimed at reducing transmission rates and ultimately achieving elimination. This initiative is in harmony with both local objectives and the broader global strategy for malaria eradication set for 2030. Additionally, the effective execution of these control measures is integral to advancing the goal of malaria elimination across Mekong River countries by 2030.

45. The Ministry of Education and Sports has taken significant steps to enhance the educational curriculum by incorporating traffic safety education at all levels, from primary to secondary schools. For primary education, traffic rules are integrated into the curriculum for Grades 1 to 5, contributing to academic merit evaluations. At the secondary level, these rules are embedded within civic education courses. In addition, relevant authorities from the Ministry of Public Security, along with provincial and district offices, conduct annual campaigns on traffic laws in selected schools, promoting awareness and compliance. Furthermore, Article 9 of the Law on Land Traffic clearly stipulates that traffic regulations must be integrated into the educational curriculum at all levels, including kindergarten and vocational training. This initiative is designed to ensure that traffic safety information is effectively disseminated throughout society using diverse outreach methods.

46. In addition, a training program for young children has been initiated to emphasize the significance of road safety and promote appropriate behaviours that prevent traffic accidents. These efforts aim to foster resilience and ensure adherence to traffic safety regulations. In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Security, provincial and municipal public security departments have launched annual campaigns focused on traffic regulations in schools within their jurisdictions.

47. Lao PDR's legal framework does not provide exceptions for the marriage of individuals under the age of 18. Article 150 of the Civil Code clearly stipulates that both girls and boys must be at least 18 years old to marry. In addition, Article 269 of the Penal Code mandates penalties for violations, stating that "anyone who marries a child under the age of

18 will face imprisonment ranging from three months to one year or a fine between 2,000,000 to 5,000,000 kip. The same penalties apply to those who allow a child under 18 to marry.” In addition, recognizing the importance of preventing early marriages, the Government has undertaken awareness-raising campaigns to disseminate information on relevant laws, particularly family law, to the public, children, and students. These campaigns aim to educate communities about the legal consequences and social impacts of child marriage. To further protect children’s rights, the Government has also established several child protection hotlines, offering support and guidance for victims of abuse and children in vulnerable situations. These include the 156 National Assembly hotline, the 1362 hotline for the Counselling and Protection Center for Women and Children, the 1300 Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling Police hotline (also available on WhatsApp at 020 2288 1300), and the 1554 Lao Youth Union hotline. These hotlines provide vital support and guidance to victims of abuse, assist children who have experienced mistreatment, and offer information on a wide range of issues affecting youth and children.

Article 11

Right to an adequate standard of living

48. The Government has made considerable efforts to address poverty by directing relevant central and provincial sectors to focus on the implementation of poverty alleviation targets, as outlined in the National Assembly’s Resolution No. 82/NA and the Government Decree No. 348/Gov, dated November 16, 2017, which establishes the criteria for poverty graduation and development. These efforts have been bolstered by investments in capital and projects aimed at reducing poverty, ensuring that communities have access to financial resources, and promoting the production of goods and services to create stable employment opportunities and generate sustainable incomes. The notable initiatives include the provision of 244 greenhouses to targeted groups (with a plan to establish 323 in total), the distribution of saplings to 193 model families for cultivation across 193 hectares of land (with a target of 197 hectares), and the formation of 4,193 production groups, covering 2,248 crop groups, 1,776 livestock groups, 115 fisheries groups, 26 product processing groups, and 28 service groups, in 108 districts across 3,555 villages. Additionally, the Government has actively supported and monitored the implementation of village development funds in poor districts, each utilizing an allocation of 500 million LAK per district. As of 2023, village development funds hold a total of 30,454.98 million LAK, with a circulating capital of 49,815.67 million LAK. Furthermore, the Government expanded the village development fund initiative to eight additional poor districts, benefiting 188 families in two villages, across five districts and three provinces nationwide, with a total capital of 914.40 million LAK.

49. To address child malnutrition and ensure the right to adequate food for all, the Government has implemented the National Nutrition Strategy (2015–2025) and the National Plan of Action on Nutrition (2021–2025) as key policy frameworks. These are led by the National Nutrition Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, and supported by Provincial and District Nutrition Committees, as well as village-level offices, each playing a critical role in driving nutrition initiatives. The coordination mechanisms at all levels include planning, monitoring, evaluation, and regular quarterly meetings to review progress, identify challenges, and share lessons learned. These are distributed across various sectors: the health sector (with one joint activity with the education and sports sector, 19 total indicators, three shared indicators, and 82 activities), the education and sports sector (one joint activity with the health sector, seven total indicators, and 41 activities), and the agriculture and forestry sector (with four indicators and 36 activities). Additionally, multi-sectoral activities include 11 indicators and 78 initiatives aimed at improving nutritional outcomes. Furthermore, a key aspect of the strategy is the development of a multi-sectoral implementation manual to ensure coordinated efforts across Government bodies and foster broad participation from all stakeholders.

50. The Government has pursued policies on resettlement and vocational development in accordance with the Constitution and relevant laws, focusing on infrastructure development, rural improvement, and poverty alleviation as both immediate and long-term strategic priorities. These efforts aim to enhance the living standards and well-being of the population.

To this end, the Government has allocated budgets, deployed personnel, and provided material resources for resettlement and vocational programs, adjusting these allocations based on evolving needs and available capacities. Additionally, the Government encourages the participation of individuals, legal entities, and both domestic and international sectors in conducting research, analysis, and providing financial contributions to support resettlement and vocational development, in line with the Law on Resettlement and Vocational Development. In further support of these efforts, the Prime Minister issued Order No. 34/PM, which sets forth the directions, objectives, and measures for building strategic provinces, strengthening district capabilities, and promoting comprehensive village development. The focus is on creating sustainable livelihoods, upgrading large villages into small districts, developing essential infrastructure, and providing technical support and access to credit through Nayoby Bank. Between 2016 and 2020, a total of 1,697.55 billion LAK in credit was allocated to these initiatives, including 1,286.10 billion LAK for targeted poor districts, 214.88 billion LAK for Government and local authority projects, and 196.57 billion LAK for the “3 Builds Directives”.¹ These measures aim to stimulate local production, improve access to essential services, and enhance income generation and living conditions for people.

51. The Government has consistently prioritized securing financial resources, both domestically and from international development partners, to support the relocation and consolidation of dispersed rural villages into larger, more sustainable communities. This initiative has been central to rural development efforts, with the goal of improving infrastructure such as roads, schools, healthcare centers, irrigation systems, and agricultural facilities. Additionally, the Government has facilitated land allocation for residential and productive purposes, issuing land survey certificates and establishing regulations on land use through community participation. Further efforts have been made to elevate large villages into small districts in rural areas, as part of a broader strategy to enhance living standards and bridge the socio-economic divide between urban and rural populations.

The evaluation of the implementation of the indicators for safe water consumption and toilet use in 2023

52. Over the past year, efforts to ensure access to safe water and maintain a clean environment have faced several challenges. While a limited number of activities were executed across various provinces, many either fell short of implementation or were not conducted as initially planned. This was particularly evident in the monitoring and promotional efforts at the local level, which were hindered by constrained budget allocations. Additionally, community-level engagement and guidance were inconsistent, affecting overall progress. Despite these challenges, indicators for safe water consumption and sanitation facilities have shown notable improvement. As of September 2023, the cumulative rate of safe water consumption reached 93.12%, reflecting a modest increase of 0.13% from the previous month. For the entire year of 2023, the total safe water consumption rate stood at 93.25%. In terms of sanitation, the cumulative toilet usage rate as of September 2023 was recorded at 84.18%, with an increase of 0.32% from the prior month, culminating in a cumulative toilet usage rate of 84.58% for the year. These developments underscore the commitment to enhancing public health and well-being.

Article 12 **Right to physical and mental health**

53. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific protocols were established for caesarean sections involving mothers diagnosed with COVID-19. In such cases, the procedure was conducted in a designated surgical room, with the newborn separated from the mother immediately following the operation. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and practices from various countries advocate against this separation, emphasizing the importance of maternal-infant bonding and breastfeeding in promoting the health and well-being of both mother and child. In addition, the Government implemented

¹ Building development units, building comprehensively strong district units, and building strategic provincial units.

the 1st to 6th Manuals for COVID-19 Infection Control to safeguard the provision of general surgeries, health check-ups, and other essential health services, thereby ensuring a continued response to the pandemic while maintaining access to critical health care. Concerning mental health legislation, the Department of Health Care and Rehabilitation within the Ministry of Health has endorsed the Mental Health Strategy 2020, which has been implemented across central and provincial hospitals. This strategy is complemented by the 2023 Manual for the Promotion of Mental Health and Psychosocial Care, aimed at enhancing mental health services and support. In terms of mental health statistics, the Division of Outpatient Examination recorded a total of 2,509 cases diagnosed with mental health disorders in 2023, of which 234 resulted in hospitalization.

54. The Government has adopted a comprehensive approach to mental health by implementing the Mental Health Strategy, the National Plan of Action for Mental Health Services, and the Policy on STI Prevention and Control, all supported by the World Health Organization. To strengthen the capacity of the national health system in psychological care, the Ministry of Health has developed the Manual for the Promotion of Mental Health and Psychosocial Care. The Lao Youth and Adolescent Development Strategy 2021–2030 further articulates strategies aimed at increasing investment in research and enhancing services to expand psychosocial counselling in schools and healthcare facilities, thereby addressing the mental health challenges faced by youth and adolescents. In addition, various sectors – including the Lao Front for National Development, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union, the Lao Women’s Union, the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare – collaborate to promote mental health awareness. These entities engage in educational initiatives, counselling services, advocacy, and the dissemination of information, ensuring that the diverse multi-ethnic communities in Lao PDR are informed about and have access to mental health care services.

55. The National Strategic Plan (2021–2030) and the Action Plan (2021–2025) for the Control and Prevention of HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) have been developed with comprehensive involvement from relevant sectors, stakeholders, mass organizations, non-profit associations, international organizations, and non-Governmental organizations. This initiative is based on the findings from the evaluation of the previous National Strategic Plan (2016–2020), the Global AIDS Monitoring Report (GAM), the HIV Epidemiology Review, and the Joint Program Review for Tuberculosis and HIV. The overarching aim of this strategic plan is to advance the objectives set forth in the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021–2025) and the Health Development Plan (2021–2025). It is aligned with the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) targets to achieve 95-95-95 by 2025. This framework seeks to ensure that 95% of individuals living with HIV are aware of their status, 95% of those diagnosed receive effective anti-HIV treatment, and 95% of individuals on treatment attain viral suppression. Achieving these targets is crucial in the global effort to halt HIV transmission and work towards its eradication by 2030.

56. Under the leadership of the National Committee against AIDS, and through the collaborative efforts of technical teams and partners from various sectors – including mass organizations, Lao Civil Society Organizations, international bodies, and both public and private non-Governmental organizations – we have successfully maintained a low prevalence of HIV infection in the country. As of now, the HIV infection rate among the general population is 0.28%, with higher prevalence rates of 1% among sex workers and 2.5% among men who have sex with men (MSM).

57. The National Strategic Plan (2021–2030) for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS integrates these efforts with broader public health initiatives, addressing interconnected issues such as tuberculosis, reproductive health, maternal and child health, and overall health promotion. This comprehensive approach is essential for empowering at-risk populations with the necessary knowledge and resources to safeguard themselves against HIV infection. By ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare services, we aim to enhance health outcomes for all individuals.

58. The Lao PDR envisions a rapid path toward being free from tuberculosis (TB) infection. This strategic initiative aligns with the World Health Organization’s objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals, aiming for a world free of tuberculosis by 2030. Our

goal is to eliminate all forms of TB infection, prevent related morbidity and mortality, and ensuring that no individual suffers from the consequences of tuberculosis.

59. The Ministry of Education and Sports has undertaken significant initiatives to advance reproductive health, promote gender equality, and implement comprehensive sex education programs as part of a five-year strategic plan developed in collaboration with the UNFPA and UNESCO. This plan integrates comprehensive sex education (CSE) into the curricula of both general and higher education institutions, aiming to empower young women and men with the necessary knowledge and skills to reduce underage marriages and unintended pregnancies. The CSE curriculum encompasses a wide range of topics, including sexual health, reproductive health, prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS, gender equality, children's rights, and the safe utilization of information and communication technology. Furthermore, various International Non-Governmental Organizations are actively involved in educational programs within Lao PDR. These initiatives are designed to foster gender awareness through participatory educational approaches and to enhance health services for secondary school students and out-of-school youth. The implementation of these programs is scheduled to take place from 2021 to 2025 in Oudomxay and Bokeo provinces.

60. In addition, the Ministry of Health has implemented the Ministerial Decision on surrogacy and abortion, ensuring compliance with the conditions set forth in Article 12 of its decision. This article specifies that induced abortion, defined as the deliberate termination of pregnancy prior to 28 weeks, may be conducted through the administration of medical interventions or surgical procedures, provided that all requisite medical and legal criteria are fulfilled. Article 12 of the Ministerial Decision on surrogacy and abortion stipulates the following conditions of abortion: For mothers: heart disease, genetic disease, nervous system disease (mental health problem); kidney disease; cancer; uncontrolled diabetes; toxemia/convulsive pregnancy; Infections during pregnancy, such as measles, herpes zoster, or cytomegalovirus (CMV), which can lead to disabilities in the child, hematological disorders; Musculoskeletal weakness. For children: intellectual disabilities; congenital heart defects, exposure to harmful substances during pregnancy (including drugs and chemotherapy agents), radiation exposure exceeding 15 rad to the unborn child, pregnancy without a viable fetus, and stillbirth. Social aspects: pregnancy in case of rape; contraceptive failure; having multiple children (more than four); living in poverty; pregnancy in persons who have not reached the legal age of consent.

Articles 13 and 14

Right to education

61. The Ministry of Education and Sports has dedicated its efforts to executing a range of strategic initiatives aimed at fulfilling the expectations articulated in the National Assembly's resolution on the Government's report concerning the implementation of annual National Socio-Economic Development Plans for 2022 and 2023 (No. 82/SNP, dated December 30, 2022). The outcomes of these initiatives indicate that, out of the 16 objectives outlined in the resolution, 13 have been successfully achieved as planned, while 3 objectives have yet to be realized. To address critical issues such as teacher shortages, high dropout rates, and the enhancement of vocational education, the Government has issued Decision No. 09/rev, dated July 17, 2023, which delineates comprehensive policies and measures to effectively tackle these challenges.

62. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued Guideline No. 4254/MOE on September 15, 2021, aimed at ensuring the continuity of education while prioritizing the health and safety of students and staff. Following this, Ministerial Decision No. 1127/MOE was issued on March 15, 2022, detailing the following essential measures: during the initial phase, schools were instructed to enforce a minimum physical distance of 1 meter between students, require the wearing of face masks, and implement regular hand hygiene practices using sanitizing gel. Furthermore, high-risk outdoor activities were suspended, resulting in the temporary closure of pre-schools and kindergartens to mitigate the spread of the virus. As the situation progressed, educational institutions, including universities, colleges, secondary, and primary schools, were

encouraged to transition to online teaching and learning modalities where feasible. For those institutions unable to meet the criteria for remote instruction, temporary closures were mandated, with provisions for compensatory teaching to be arranged following the subsidence of the COVID-19 crisis.

Article 15

Cultural Rights

63. The Lao PDR is dedicated to the protection and promotion of cultural rights, recognizing them as a vital part of its national identity and the rich diversity of its 50 ethnic groups. These cultural rights are firmly enshrined in the Constitution, specifically in Article 8 and 23, which guarantee citizens the freedom to preserve, develop, and promote their cultural heritage, customs, and traditions, as well as in Article 45 which guarantees the right and freedom of Lao citizens to conduct research and apply scientific technologies and innovation to create artistic and literary works, and to engage in cultural activities which are not contrary to the laws.

64. To ensure the safeguarding of these cultural rights, the Government has also enacted various laws and policies. The amended Law on National Heritage establishes robust protections for cultural assets and stipulates penalties for actions that infringe upon national heritage. Complementary legislation, including the Law on Mass Media, the Law on Museums, the Law on Performing Arts, the Law on Libraries, the Law on Publishing, and the Law on Fine Arts, collectively enhance the preservation and promotion of cultural rights across all ethnic groups. In addition, several decrees, such as the Decree on the National Dress and the Decree on the Creation of Cultural Families and Villages, in supporting these efforts. In addition to these legal provisions, the Government has outlined its commitment to digital transformation through the National Digital Economy Development Vision Strategy (2021–2040), the National Digital Economy Development Strategy (2021–2030), and the National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021–2025).

65. The Government has actively promoted the role of mass media and publishers as essential tools for fostering cultural awareness and ensuring public access to information about national customs and traditions. This initiative is designed to highlight the rich diversity of cultural expressions within the nation and promote a better understanding of its unique way of life on the global stage. Presently, the country has 116 different media outlets, comprising 13 private entities and 103 public institutions. This includes 11 daily newspapers and a total of 168 radio stations, which consist of 86 FM and AM stations, alongside 82 network radio channels. The television landscape features 49 stations, including 25 analog, 10 satellite, and 14 digital broadcasts. These platforms have played a crucial role in delivering news in multiple languages, including Hmong and Khmer, and operate 86 online news portals, with 7,694 of community speaker sets installed. The country also hosts 81 printing houses, of which 7 are central and 74 are local. Among these, there are 17 commercial printing operations, comprised of 2 state-owned and 15 private enterprises. Cultural documentaries are broadcast 864 times annually, supplemented by 144 cultural program broadcasts each year.

66. Additionally, the Government has implemented policies aimed at cultivating cultural families and villages, resulting in the establishment of 1,064,870 cultural families, which represents 78.13% of the target, and 7,138 cultural villages, equivalent to 84.88%. Additionally, there are 34 children's cultural centers at the local level, benefiting approximately 1,700 children. Moreover, the country also boasts 16 registered national historical sites which several of these historical sites have been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as world heritage sites, including the District of Luang Prabang, the Phu Champasak Temple, and the Plain of Jars in Xiengkhouang. Moreover, Khaen music and the Naga motif weaving practices of the Lao people have been acknowledged as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Proposals have been put forth to register Phu Hin Nam No in Khammouan province, along with "Lam Vong" (traditional Lao dance) and "Su Kwan" (Baci ceremony), as world heritage.