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Lao People's Democratic Republic

Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I. Background

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, taking into consideration the outcome of the previous review.¹ It is a compilation of information contained in relevant United Nations documents, presented in a summarized manner owing to word-limit constraints.

II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with human rights mechanisms

2. The United Nations country team, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.² The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women also recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.³ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities encouraged the Lao People's Democratic Republic to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.⁴

III. National human rights framework

Institutional infrastructure and policy measures

3. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic establish a national human rights institution with a broad mandate that was in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), including its full independence. It recommended providing the institution with an explicit mandate and sufficient human, technical and financial resources to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.⁵ Similarly, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended establishing an independent national human rights institution



in accordance with the Paris Principles, with a broad mandate to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality.⁶

IV. Promotion and protection of human rights

A. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law

1. Equality and non-discrimination

4. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic amend the Constitution to incorporate a provision to prohibit gender-based discrimination. It also recommended adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, covering direct and indirect discrimination in the public and the private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.⁷

5. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) review legislation to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability (including against persons affected by leprosy), including Law No. 73 on hygiene, disease prevention and health promotion, Law No. 62 on education and Law No. 77 on gender equality; (b) prohibit multiple and intersectional discrimination on the grounds of disability and its intersection with other grounds, such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and any other status, and adopt strategies to eliminate multiple and intersectional discrimination; and (c) recognize within anti-discrimination law the denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination within all areas of life.⁸

2. Right to life, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture

6. The United Nations country team reported that a de facto moratorium on capital executions had been in place since 1989. Nevertheless, the death penalty remained on the books for 12 offences, including drug-related and other offences that did not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes".

7. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic reduce the number of offences for which the death penalty could be imposed, with a view to abolishing it for all offences. It also recommended making public data on all capital crimes, including data on charges, convictions and sentences, and disaggregating the data by gender, age, nationality, ethnic origin and social status.⁹

8. The Human Rights Committee regretted that no measures had been taken to effectively criminalize enforced disappearance in accordance with international standards. It also regretted the alleged lack of thorough, impartial and transparent investigation into cases of enforced disappearance, including that of Sombath Somphone, and the fact that impunity for such crimes had persisted.¹⁰ In June 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the Government to continue investigations into cases of enforced disappearance, such as that of Sombath Somphone, whose family had been seeking truth and justice for more than 11 years, and to ensure that families were kept regularly informed.¹¹

9. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) repeal all legislation and practices that allowed for the deprivation of liberty of adults and children with disabilities on the basis of actual or perceived impairment or that authorized institutionalization or involuntary hospitalization of persons with disabilities; and (b) prevent the confinement of persons with disabilities within their homes and provide for human rights-based support and community services for all persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.¹²

3. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law

10. The United Nations country team reported that, as of August 2024, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had 532 accredited lawyers, of whom 133 were women. Nevertheless,

their capacity was limited. Although precise statistical data were unavailable, instances of prosecutions without access to legal representation had reportedly occurred. Lawyers encountered constraints in effectively fulfilling their roles, including limited access to clients and evidential information during investigations.¹³

11. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure that the Lao Bar Association was included as a formal member in relevant forums. It also recommended establishing effective complaint mechanisms within the courts to enable lawyers to raise concerns, including on potential constraints encountered in the fulfilment of their professional roles.¹⁴ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended adopting measures to provide legal assistance and gender- and age-appropriate procedural accommodation for persons with disabilities to enable their participation in all legal procedures on an equal basis with others.¹⁵ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended allocating adequate funding for legal aid schemes and ensuring that they were accessible to all women.¹⁶

12. The United Nations country team reported that criminal case management within the court system lacked systematization, with practices insufficiently standardized and accountability mechanisms not fully operational. That compromised the court system's ability to adjudicate cases coherently and to uphold the right to a fair trial for those seeking justice.¹⁷

13. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic enhance independent monitoring and complaints mechanisms to ensure the lawfulness of arrest and detention procedures.¹⁸

14. The United Nations country team reported that no effective complaint mechanisms existed in detention facilities. Interrogation procedures were not sufficiently monitored and no meaningful redress and compensation systems were in place for victims and their families.¹⁹

15. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic develop and implement comprehensive training programmes on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment for key line ministries, including the police, prison guards and military personnel.²⁰

4. Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life

16. The United Nations country team reported that, despite constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms, civic space in the Lao People's Democratic Republic remained closed. Legislation with vaguely worded and restrictive provisions curtailed the enjoyment of people's rights, including the rights to privacy, freedom of expression online and offline, freedom of association and peaceful assembly.²¹ The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention noted that the provisions contained in article 117 of the Penal Code lacked sufficient detail and might proscribe the peaceful exercise of rights.²²

17. Several United Nations human rights mechanisms recorded allegations of arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, enforced disappearance, violations of the right to a fair trial, renditions, transnational repression and other infringements of the rights of human rights defenders.²³

18. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic repeal the articles of the Penal Code that were not in line with international human rights standards and immediately release all persons who had been arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms.²⁴

19. The United Nations country team reported that the Government maintained strict control over freedom of expression, including the freedom of the media. Online criticism was criminalized under Decree No. 327 on Internet-Based Information Management and Control (2014), the Law on Preventing and Combating Cybercrime (2015) and article 117 of the Penal Code (2017) on "propaganda against the State". Those laws limited freedom of expression online and offline and encouraged self-censorship, hindering the development of an enabling environment in which people could meaningfully participate in decisions that affected them. There were also alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals against individuals

seeking to cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms.²⁵ Decree No. 238 on Associations (2017) granted the Government the power, *inter alia*, to prohibit the formation of associations and to monitor associations' activities. Civil society organizations continued to face varying levels of scrutiny based on their focus areas.²⁶

20. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic amend or repeal laws and regulations limiting fundamental freedoms and that it create an environment where everyone could enjoy their fundamental rights without fear of sanction or reprisal.²⁷ It also recommended removing the restrictions on the registration and activities of all civil society organizations and fostering an enabling environment for advocacy and engagement in public dialogue without fear of retaliation.²⁸ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended investigating and punishing acts of reprisals against women human rights defenders and other activists.²⁹

21. The United Nations country team reported that Decree No. 315 on Management and Protection of Religious Activities (2015) required any religious group operating in the country to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry could order cessation of any religious activity or expression of beliefs not in agreement with policies, traditional customs, laws or regulations within its jurisdiction and could stop any religious activity it deemed to pose a threat to national stability, peace and social order, to cause serious damage to the environment or to affect national solidarity or unity among tribes and religions, including threats to the lives, property, health or reputation of others. In the previous few years, incidents had been reported of religious minorities facing harassment and discrimination, eviction from their homes, arbitrary arrest and detention due to their beliefs.³⁰

22. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic amend Decree No. 315 to bring it in line with international human rights standards and take measures necessary to prevent and combat discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.³¹

23. The Human Rights Committee regretted the reported continued restriction of a multi-party system and the fact that all candidates had to be approved by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party or a State-sponsored mass organization, as well as the *de facto* exclusion of ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong, in politics and public life. Moreover, it regretted the lack of measures taken to revise legislation denying all convicted prisoners the right to vote and to ensure that legislation did not discriminate against persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities by denying them the right to vote.³²

24. The United Nations country team reported that women's participation in politics, including in the National Assembly, had declined in 2022 compared to previous years. Women's representation in the National Assembly had dropped to 21.95 per cent in 2021, down from 27.5 per cent in the preceding legislature. In addition, in 2020, only 43 women (23.26 per cent) had held ministerial level or equivalent roles, while 105 women (20.95 per cent) had occupied vice-ministerial level positions.³³

25. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) ensure that citizens could participate in the conduct of public affairs and engage in public discussions, both online and offline, without fear of retribution; (b) institutionalize the engagement of national civil society organizations and other civic stakeholders in all relevant decision-making processes; (c) provide information on the procedures governing the nomination of candidates for the National Assembly, Provincial People's Assemblies and other institutions at the subnational level; and (d) promote the participation of women, especially women from marginalized groups, in politics at all levels.³⁴ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended taking immediate steps to reach parity in all decision-making systems, including by adopting temporary special measures, such as systems that alternated between women and men candidates, and ensuring equal access to and transparency of nomination processes.³⁵ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended amending constitutional and legislative provisions restricting the rights of persons with disabilities to vote, to stand in elections and to hold public office.³⁶

5. Right to marriage and family life

26. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic prohibit forced marriage, provide women with adequate income-generating opportunities and social benefits to address poverty as a root cause of forced marriage, and raise awareness on risk factors driving women into forced marriage.³⁷

6. Prohibition of all forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons

27. The United Nations country team reported that the Lao People's Democratic Republic had become a country of destination, in addition to being a country of origin, of trafficking in persons. Trafficking in persons and forced labour had reportedly increased, along with other illicit activities associated with cyberscam schemes in the Golden Triangle special economic zone, where Government oversight was limited. In several reported cases, victims of trafficking in persons, who had been lured by offers of well-paying jobs posted on social media, had experienced substantial restrictions on their rights and freedoms. Girls and young women from rural and remote areas were most at risk of being trapped in prostitution and sexual activities. Despite the efforts of the Government to tackle trafficking in persons, challenges persisted, including the uneven availability of protection services for marginalized groups and the low level of anti-trafficking awareness and capacity among border officials in key transit areas. Available services provided by the Counselling and Protection Centre for Women and Children, operated by the Lao Women's Union, were currently insufficient to adequately assist victims of trafficking, due to limited resources and facilities. In 2023, only two fully operational shelters had existed, one in the city of Vientiane and one in Luang Namtha Province, and they had been unable to meet the needs across the country.³⁸

28. The United Nations country team, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and ILO recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic step up the fight against trafficking in persons and allocate resources to the identification, investigation and prosecution of all cases of trafficking, with a particular focus on women and children.³⁹

7. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

29. The United Nations country team and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reported that challenges remained in realizing labour rights, particularly with regard to regulating workplace harassment and sexual harassment in national legislation, and regulating the minimum wage.⁴⁰

30. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) recognize sexual harassment as a criminal offence and ensure victim protection; (b) amend the Labour Law and other legislation to address sexual harassment in employment and in all workplace contexts; and (c) ensure timely adjustments to the minimum wage to reflect the country's economic and financial hardships.⁴¹

31. The United Nations country team reported that, despite efforts to enforce provisions acknowledging the right of workers to form trade unions, workers' knowledge of their rights remained limited. Many workplaces in the country lacked a trade union or other form of representation.⁴²

32. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic take measures to enhance workers' knowledge of their rights, including the right to form a trade union.⁴³

33. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) take effective measures to increase employment of persons with disabilities, in particular persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, women with disabilities, persons affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities living in rural areas, and in the public and the private sectors; (b) consider implementing an affirmative action programme to ensure job placement and job retention for persons with disabilities in the public and the private sectors; and (c) guarantee non-discrimination in employment, including by the provision of reasonable accommodation

when required and by raising awareness among employers, and ensure that the open labour market was inclusive and accessible and that there were decent labour conditions for all persons with disabilities, including equal pay for work of equal value.⁴⁴ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended adopting a comprehensive strategy and programme to promote women's employment, including temporary special measures to reach women's equal participation in sectors where they were underrepresented and their transition from informal to formal employment.⁴⁵

8. Right to social security

34. The United Nations country team reported that the Government had recently conducted a midterm review of the National Social Protection Strategy and was committed to improving financing strategies and coordination mechanisms, including through the implementation of child- and disability-focused social protection initiatives. While recent data showed a significant increase in the number of households covered by social transfers, the limited number of people receiving social assistance indicated slow progress towards universal coverage. In addition, investments in social protection continued to rely heavily on donors.⁴⁶ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights regretted the decline in public spending on social services, including social protection.⁴⁷

35. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic formulate a responsible financing strategy for social protection that took into consideration the country's current macroeconomic challenges.⁴⁸

9. Right to an adequate standard of living

36. The United Nations country team noted that the Lao People's Democratic Republic had experienced considerable economic growth in the previous decade, leading to significant strides in poverty reduction and improvements in the living conditions of some segments of the population. Notwithstanding those achievements, the growth model had not been inclusive or diversified, and the benefits of development had been unevenly distributed across provinces and population groups. As a result, socioeconomic inequalities had increased, including within urban areas and between rural and urban areas, leaving those already vulnerable at greater risk of being left behind.⁴⁹

37. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure that a human rights-based approach was adopted when developing the tenth national socioeconomic development plan, incorporating specific human rights indicators across all pillars and outcomes.⁵⁰ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended making priority efforts to eliminate poverty among women, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups of women, and promoting their access to low-interest loans without collateral and their participation in entrepreneurial initiatives to empower them economically and provide them with opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to participate fully in economic life.⁵¹ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended establishing social protection and poverty reduction schemes with adequate budgetary allocations to guarantee a decent standard of living for persons with disabilities, and providing them with allowances to meet disability-related expenses.⁵²

10. Right to health

38. The United Nations country team reported that economic challenges had further strained the health system, hindering progress in healthcare. Besides the availability of services, difficulties in accessing healthcare continued to disproportionately affect those living in hard-to-reach areas, those not in the Lao-Tai ethno-linguistic group and those with limited means and health literacy. Healthcare expenditure remained low. Despite decreases in under-5 and neonatal mortality, limited access to antenatal care and immunization hindered progress. While efforts were under way to expand adolescent- and youth-friendly services, they were currently available in only 6 of the 18 provinces. HIV remained a public health concern; there had been an increase in new HIV infections in 2023, nearly half of which were among young people aged 15–24 years old. AIDS-related deaths were also estimated to have increased. Although HIV treatment was progressing, only a limited number of people received treatment. Persistent stigma and discrimination towards key populations, especially

gay men, men who had sex with men, sex workers, transgender people and people who injected drugs, remained considerable barriers to effective prevention, treatment and care. Despite progress in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, including through the strengthening and scaling up of services, challenges remained in access to treatment for pregnant women.⁵³

39. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) conduct a comprehensive review of the family planning programme and undertake a study to identify and address existing gaps; (b) implement targeted interventions and allocate resources to improve maternal and child health outcomes, reversing the trend of increasing adolescent births and addressing stagnant key health indicators; and (c) intensify efforts to increase the coverage of prevention of mother-to-child transmission services, especially in the most remote and hardest-to-reach areas.⁵⁴ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended redressing discrepancies between rural and urban areas in women's access to health services, in particular sexual and reproductive health services, paying particular attention to women and girls from ethnic minority groups.⁵⁵

40. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) adopt and implement a strategy, with sufficient human, technical and financial resources, to remove the physical, communication and financial barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing healthcare services, and guarantee their access to disability- and gender-sensitive healthcare services and information, especially in rural areas; (b) ensure quality and inclusive healthcare services in the entire State, including in rural and remote areas, and for all the diversity of persons with disabilities; (c) provide persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities, with access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services, and ensure supported decision-making for women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities so that they could reaffirm their sexual and reproductive autonomy and self-determination; and (d) develop community and human rights-based mental health services and support across the State.⁵⁶

11. Right to education

41. The United Nations country team reported that economic challenges had contributed to a decrease in household incomes, leading families, especially those already at a disadvantage, to cut back on educational expenses, withdraw their children from school or delay their enrolment. Dropout rates in both lower secondary and upper secondary schools had increased, while the percentage of adolescents of upper secondary school age not enrolled in any form of education was estimated to have risen drastically by 20 percentage points compared to previous years. Violence in educational settings remained a problem. The Lao People's Democratic Republic continued to face severe challenges in recruiting, allocating and retaining teachers, with an estimated shortage of over 5,000 teachers compounded by a limited recruitment quota.⁵⁷

42. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) increase the national budget for education, particularly the non-wage recurrent budget; (b) prioritize the enhancement of student learning outcomes in education spending and support equitable access to educational opportunities; (c) enhance support for vulnerable girls and boys from low-income families, those from rural and remote regions and those with disabilities, facilitating their entry into early childhood education and general education; and (d) establish a flexible teacher recruitment system that was responsive to student enrolment, teacher attrition and school growth to effectively address staff shortages.⁵⁸ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities made similar recommendations in relation to persons with disabilities.⁵⁹ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended adopting temporary special measures and conducting public awareness-raising campaigns to ensure parity in fields of study where girls were traditionally underrepresented.⁶⁰

12. Cultural rights

43. The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights stated that the Lao People's Democratic Republic must not sacrifice cultural diversity and cultural rights in the name of economic development and State unity.⁶¹

44. Although cultural rights were recognized in national legislation, the Special Rapporteur remained concerned about policies assimilating ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples into the main Lao ethnic group, as well as the “folklorization” of culture for tourism. She highlighted prejudice against non-dominant cultural practices labelled as “backward”, policies promoting “good culture” aligned with the party line, Lao-only education without cultural accommodation and village relocations threatening traditional lifestyles.⁶²

45. The Special Rapporteur considered that the Government’s refusal to recognize the existence of ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples who suffered from marginalization amounted to refusing them the protection of international standards that applied to their specific situations.⁶³

46. She said that proper consultation, where people could express their needs and grievances, let alone the free, prior and informed consent of local communities, was not possible in a context where civic space simply did not exist and people feared retaliation.⁶⁴

13. Development, the environment, and business and human rights

47. The United Nations country team reported that land issues remained a concern and had a disproportionate impact on rural and non-Lao-Tai ethnic communities. Heavy reliance on natural resource extraction and large-scale infrastructure projects had had detrimental effects on the environment, exacerbating land degradation and loss of biodiversity and damaging ecosystems. While national legislation was in place recognizing peoples’ rights to be consulted, to be involved in decision-making processes and to fair compensation for resettlement, in some instances large infrastructure projects had been constructed without the meaningful engagement of local communities and had led to the displacement and relocation of communities, at times without their consent and/or without timely and adequate compensation.⁶⁵ The Human Rights Committee was concerned at reports indicating an alleged increase in forced and illegal land-grabbing by the authorities under the “Turning Land into Capital” policy, resulting in the mass displacement of rural communities.⁶⁶ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was concerned that the 2019 Land Law no longer required that land titles were allocated to both spouses, which could lead to discrimination against women in land ownership.⁶⁷

48. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic ensure that all decision-making processes related to the design and implementation of infrastructure and investment projects were conducted with the free, informed and meaningful participation of affected individuals and communities.⁶⁸ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that it was crucial for the Government to ensure adequate and meaningful consultation with ethnic minorities, with respect for their right to free, prior and informed consent.⁶⁹

49. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic increase investments in climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services, prioritizing access for the most vulnerable populations. It also recommended delivering sustainable sanitation and hygiene solutions in communities, schools and healthcare facilities, ensuring that no one was left behind.⁷⁰

50. The United Nations country team further recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: (a) strengthen the legal framework to codify the right to a healthy environment in national laws and policies, including due diligence for large-scale investment projects; (b) ensure environmental justice through participatory policymaking processes, access to information and effective remedies for communities and individuals; (c) establish laws, policies and mechanisms to protect environmental human rights defenders; (d) promote sustainable and rights-based resource management, including prevention of deforestation, promotion of reforestation and expansion and safeguarding of existing conservation areas to protect biodiversity; (e) support farmers in adopting agricultural practices, not relying on slash-and-burn methods, to address pollution; and (f) integrate a gender perspective into the National Disaster Management Committee.⁷¹ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women made similar recommendations.⁷²

51. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic implement the road map for a national action plan on business and human rights

and allocate adequate financial and human resources for its implementation, while focusing on human rights due diligence and the enforcement of existing regulations.⁷³

B. Rights of specific persons or groups

1. Women

52. The United Nations country team reported that, despite improvements, challenges to gender parity remained, including stigma, fear of retribution, discriminatory gender stereotypes, a lack of specialized justice and policing services, and limited legal literacy. There was insufficient information regarding the effectiveness of current complaint mechanisms in addressing and reducing discriminatory gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination within the justice system.⁷⁴

53. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) amend the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women (2015) to include precise legal definitions, including of what constituted a serious case of violence; (b) conduct the second national survey on the prevalence of violence against women to collect accurate data, including on emerging forms of violence; (c) provide training for law enforcement officials, judges and other stakeholders on gender equality laws; (d) establish specialized law enforcement units and dedicated courts to ensure that victims of gender-based violence could seek adequate redress and comprehensive victim support services; and (e) develop and implement targeted measures to support women and girls with limited education and economic disadvantages in navigating the formal justice system and reporting relevant issues, including cases of trafficking in persons and gender-based violence.⁷⁵ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended making the necessary legal amendments to the Penal Code to specifically criminalize all forms of gender-based violence against women, including marital rape, sexual harassment and obstetric violence, and adopting a definition of rape that was based on the absence of consent.⁷⁶

2. Children

54. The United Nations country team noted that discriminatory gender norms and power dynamics persisted and had a disproportionate impact on adolescent girls, exposing them to heightened risks of child marriage, unintended pregnancy and school dropout. That, in turn, limited their bodily autonomy, agency and leadership. The child marriage rate in the Lao People's Democratic Republic was the highest in the East Asia and Pacific Region. Although marriage below the age of 18 was prohibited under the Penal Code (2017), in 2023, some 30.5 per cent of young women had been married before the age of 18, with the percentage exceeding 50 per cent for women without education, those from certain ethnic groups and those in the poorest quintile.⁷⁷

55. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) operationalize and disseminate the amended Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children; (b) revise relevant national legislation to eradicate child and early marriage and intensify efforts to prevent child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence against adolescent girls, such as bride kidnapping, trafficking, sexual exploitation and intimate partner violence; and (c) allocate an adequate budget to child protection systems, strengthen the social service workforce and enhance quality services for both prevention and response.⁷⁸

3. Persons with disabilities

56. The United Nations country team reported that, despite the progress made in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, limitations for persons with disabilities persisted both de jure and de facto.⁷⁹

57. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) increase the implementation of the Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014) to ensure that persons with disabilities had access to income security and adequate living conditions; (b) incorporate persons with disabilities in the forthcoming tenth

national socioeconomic development plan, the 2025 population and housing census and the second national survey on the prevalence of violence against women; (c) collect systematic and accurate disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, including through the enhanced implementation of the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning; and (d) facilitate capacity-building for family members and professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills in supporting children with disabilities.⁸⁰ The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities made similar recommendations.⁸¹

4. Indigenous Peoples and minorities

58. The United Nations country team reported that, while the principle of non-discrimination toward ethnic groups was enshrined in the Constitution, non-Lao-Tai groups appeared to be disproportionately affected by resettlement. Concerns persisted regarding the adequacy of informed consent from resettled individuals, raising questions about alignment with international standards, the principle of free, prior and informed consent and article 40 of the Constitution, which recognized the freedom of settlement and movement for Lao citizens.⁸²

59. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that addressed direct and indirect discrimination and encompassed all the prohibited grounds of discrimination, including ethnicity.⁸³

60. The Human Rights Committee was concerned about information indicating the continued persecution of and discrimination against members of the Hmong ethnic minority.⁸⁴

61. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requested information on measures taken, and their impact, to address the human rights abuses reportedly perpetrated against members of the Hmong community, including members of the ChaoFa Hmong community in Xaisomboun Province, and on strategies adopted to combat discrimination against them and to safeguard their economic, social and cultural rights.⁸⁵

5. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons

62. The United Nations country team reported that, although homosexuality was not illegal, no explicit legal protections were in place prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite improving social attitudes, LGBTQI+ individuals continued to face discrimination in workplaces, educational institutions and healthcare facilities. Transgender individuals encountered additional challenges.⁸⁶

63. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that addressed direct and indirect discrimination and encompassed all the prohibited grounds of discrimination, including sexual orientation and gender identity, and integrated considerations of intersectionality; (b) recognize the existence of LGBTQI+ persons in legislation, policies and the national development agenda and promote the formal registration of LGBTQI+ civil society organizations; and (c) implement awareness-raising programmes and campaigns to end stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons.⁸⁷

6. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers

64. The United Nations country team reported that migrants still faced barriers to healthcare access, including legal restrictions and language differences. Initiatives such as migrant health insurance schemes, cross-border referrals and pre-departure information were currently lacking.⁸⁸

65. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic: (a) disseminate and provide technical capacity training to key stakeholders on Decree No. 245 on the Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad (2020) and the Ministerial Agreement No. 1050 on the Establishment and Management of Employment Service Enterprises (2022), particularly in relation to the prohibition on the charging of recruitment fees and related costs to migrant workers; (b) develop guidelines and subordinate legal

instruments to Decree No. 245 that clearly outlined the implementation and monitoring processes; and (c) ensure equal access to healthcare and social protection for migrant workers.⁸⁹

7. Stateless persons

66. The United Nations country team recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic systematically collect and disseminate data on individuals who were stateless or of undetermined nationality to identify the underlying causes of statelessness and enable the implementation of measures to strengthen access to civil registration.⁹⁰

Notes

- ¹ [A/HRC/44/6](#), [A/HRC/44/6/Add.1](#) and [A/HRC/45/2](#).
- ² United Nations country team submission for the universal periodic review of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, para. 17; [CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#), para. 62; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ³ [CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#), paras. 58 and 62.
- ⁴ [CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1](#), para. 7.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 63 (a).
- ⁶ [CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#), para. 19.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 11 (b).
- ⁸ [CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1](#), para. 9 (a)–(c). See also United Nations country team submission, paras. 106 and 108.
- ⁹ United Nations country team submission, paras. 10, 14 and 15.
- ¹⁰ [CCPR/C/141/2/Add.4](#), p. 3.
- ¹¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ¹² [CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1](#), para. 25 (b) and (c).
- ¹³ United Nations country team submission, para. 24.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 27 and 29.
- ¹⁵ [CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1](#), para. 23 (a).
- ¹⁶ [CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#), para. 13 (a).
- ¹⁷ United Nations country team submission, para. 25.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 28.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 26.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 30.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 11. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/04/lao-pdr-five-years-after-arrest-human-rights-defenders-still-denied-access>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/lao-government-must-shed-light-whereabouts-activist-sombath-somphone-un>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/lao-must-immediately-release-chinese-lawyer-lu-siwei-and-prevent-his>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/lao-pdr-un-expert-calls-out-alarming-pattern-violations-against-human-rights>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/lao-pdr-stop-deporting-human-rights-defenders-says-un-expert>. See also [A/HRC/WGAD/2021/6](#).
- ²² [A/HRC/WGAD/2021/6](#), para. 60.
- ²³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/04/lao-pdr-five-years-after-arrest-human-rights-defenders-still-denied-access>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/lao-government-must-shed-light-whereabouts-activist-sombath-somphone-un>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/lao-must-immediately-release-chinese-lawyer-lu-siwei-and-prevent-his>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/lao-pdr-un-expert-calls-out-alarming-pattern-violations-against-human-rights>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/lao-pdr-stop-deporting-human-rights-defenders-says-un-expert>. See also [A/HRC/WGAD/2021/6](#); and United Nations country team submission, para. 12.
- ²⁴ United Nations country team submission, para. 16.
- ²⁵ United Nations country team submission, para. 31. See also [A/HRC/48/28](#), paras. 82–84, annex I, para. 59, and annex II, para. 83; [A/HRC/51/47](#), para. 71, and annex II, paras. 101–103; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ²⁶ United Nations country team submission, para. 32.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 33.

- ²⁸ Ibid., para. 34.
- ²⁹ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 21 (c).
- ³⁰ United Nations country team submission, para. 42.
- ³¹ Ibid., para. 43.
- ³² CCPR/C/141/2/Add.4, p. 4.
- ³³ United Nations country team submission, para. 37. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ³⁴ United Nations country team submission, paras. 38–41.
- ³⁵ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 33 (a).
- ³⁶ CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1, para. 55 (a).
- ³⁷ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 55 (a).
- ³⁸ United Nations country team submission, paras. 19 and 21. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 28.
- ³⁹ United Nations country team submission, para. 23; CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 29; and https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4353803,103060.
- ⁴⁰ United Nations country team submission, para. 54; and CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 38.
- ⁴¹ United Nations country team submission, paras. 56–58. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 39; and https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4363377,103060.
- ⁴² United Nations country team submission, para. 55.
- ⁴³ Ibid., para. 59.
- ⁴⁴ CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1, para. 51 (a)–(c).
- ⁴⁵ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 39 (a).
- ⁴⁶ United Nations country team submission, paras. 50 and 51.
- ⁴⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ⁴⁸ United Nations country team submission, para. 53. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, paras. 48 and 49.
- ⁴⁹ United Nations country team submission, para. 44.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., para. 46.
- ⁵¹ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 49 (a).
- ⁵² CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1, para. 53 (c).
- ⁵³ United Nations country team submission, paras. 67–70. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 44.
- ⁵⁴ United Nations country team submission, paras. 71–73.
- ⁵⁵ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 41 (b).
- ⁵⁶ CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1, para. 47 (a)–(d).
- ⁵⁷ United Nations country team submission, paras. 82 and 83.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., paras. 86–89.
- ⁵⁹ CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1, para. 45.
- ⁶⁰ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 37 (b).
- ⁶¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/un-expert-urges-lao-pdr-prioritise-cultural-rights>.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ United Nations country team submission, para. 47.
- ⁶⁶ CCPR/C/141/2/Add.4, p. 6.
- ⁶⁷ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 50.
- ⁶⁸ United Nations country team submission, para. 48.
- ⁶⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ⁷⁰ United Nations country team submission, paras. 65 and 66.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., paras. 76–81.
- ⁷² CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 53.
- ⁷³ United Nations country team submission, para. 92.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., para. 95. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, paras. 12 and 24.
- ⁷⁵ United Nations country team submission, paras. 96–100. See also CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, paras. 25 and 27.
- ⁷⁶ CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10, para. 27 (d).

- ⁷⁷ United Nations country team submission, paras. 101 and 102. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/06/press-stakeout-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-un-high-commissioner-human-rights>.
- ⁷⁸ United Nations country team submission, paras. 103–105. See also [CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#), paras. 56 and 57.
- ⁷⁹ United Nations country team submission, para. 106.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 109–112.
- ⁸¹ [CRPD/C/LAO/CO/1](#).
- ⁸² United Nations country team submission, paras. 113 and 114.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, para. 115.
- ⁸⁴ [CCPR/C/141/2/Add.4](#), p. 6.
- ⁸⁵ [E/C.12/LAO/Q/1](#), para. 9.
- ⁸⁶ United Nations country team submission, para. 116.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 119–121.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 123.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 124–126.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 128.
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