

## Remarks at a State Luncheon Hosted by President Bounnyang Vorachit of Laos in Vientiane, Laos September 6, 2016

[President Bounnyang made brief remarks. He spoke in Lao, but no transcript was provided because the translation was inaudible.]

*President Obama.* Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of myself and my entire delegation, thank you so much for the warm welcome you've extended to us today.

In addition to the work that we are doing together, I very much look forward to experiencing the culture and the cuisine of Laos. I understand there's a saying in Laos that "sweet makes you dizzy, and bitter makes you healthy," and I'm looking forward to being both healthy and maybe a little dizzy as well by the end of this meal.

As the first U.S. President to visit this nation, I know my visit comes at a very important time. I won't make long remarks here; I'll be speaking later this afternoon. But for now, let me simply say how much I hope that our new

partnership will mean greater progress and opportunity for the people of Laos.

I understand that there's a ceremony that's often performed here that's based on the idea that the body has 32 souls and in bad times some souls go missing. Blessings are given when they return and when the body is whole again.

So I propose a toast to the dignity and the future of the people of Laos and to Mr. President and the Government, as well as the people: May this visit and our work together be another step towards making the relationship between our two countries whole again.

*Som seuy.*

[At this point, President Obama offered a toast.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:17 a.m. in the Dok Boua Ban Room at the Presidential Palace. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## Joint Statement—Joint Declaration Between the United States of America and the Lao People's Democratic Republic September 6, 2016

1. On the occasion of his historic state visit to Lao P.D.R., President Barack Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit held talks today in Vientiane where they officially inaugurated the Comprehensive Partnership between the Lao P.D.R. and the United States of America. Through this partnership, the United States and the Lao P.D.R. are opening a new era of bilateral relations based on mutual respect, common interests and a shared desire to heal the wounds of the past to build a foundation for the future.

2. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit decided to form a U.S.-Lao P.D.R. Comprehensive Partnership for advancing the relationship. They underlined the principles of the U.S.-Lao P.D.R. Compre-

hensive Partnership, including respect for the United Nations Charter, international law, and each other's political systems, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. They stated that the Comprehensive Partnership is intended to contribute to peace, stability, cooperation, and prosperity in each country, in the region, and in the world. The new Comprehensive Partnership will create mechanisms for cooperation in areas including political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties, science and technology, education and training, environment and health, humanitarian cooperation, war legacy issues, security, protection and promotion of human rights, and people-to-people ties.

### *Political and Diplomatic Cooperation*

3. As part of the U.S.-Lao P.D.R. Comprehensive Partnership, the two sides committed to increase high-level exchanges as well as contacts at all levels, and to intensify dialogue and cooperation mechanisms. President Obama affirmed the United States' support for Lao P.D.R.'s independence, sovereignty, prosperity, and integration into the international community. President Bounnhang Vorachit welcomed the United States' enhanced cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, which contributes to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region.

4. The two leaders welcomed the establishment of a regular dialogue between their foreign ministries, and encouraged dialogues and exchanges between entities associated with political parties in both countries.

5. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit committed to enhance cooperation at regional and international fora including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus (ADMM+) to support peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the Asia-Pacific region. The two leaders reaffirmed their support for the settlement of disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law. They also reaffirmed their support for not resorting to the threat or use of force in resolving disputes.

6. Both leaders welcomed the progress made under the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) and Friends of the Lower Mekong (FLM) in recent years. Therefore, the two presidents reaffirmed their governments' commitment to work closely together, along with other LMI and FLM members, to further strengthen cooperation through the effective implementation of projects and programs under the LMI Master Plan of Action 2016–2020 and the Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership, to enhance regional connectivity and narrow the development gaps among member countries as well as promote sustainable socio-

economic development and the well-being of people in the Mekong region.

### *War Legacy Issues*

7. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit confirmed that comprehensive cooperation in addressing war legacy issues to deepen mutual trust has allowed both countries to develop a relationship that looks to the future. To address the impact caused by unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Laos, President Obama announced that the United States intends to contribute \$90 million over three years for a national UXO survey and clearance of UXO in Laos. President Bounnhang Vorachit welcomed the U.S. government's continued commitment to clear UXO, assist UXO victims, prevent future casualties, and develop local capacity to ensure sustainability of this work.

### *Humanitarian Cooperation*

8. President Obama expressed his appreciation for the Lao P.D.R.'s continued cooperation in providing for the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the war, including its recent steps to increase the efficiency of joint search efforts. The two sides would continue to meet semi-annually for technical discussions on mission planning and strive to complete the mission in a timely and efficient manner.

### *Trade and Economic Ties*

9. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit welcomed the signing earlier this year of a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement between the two countries. The Agreement will strengthen trade ties and form a basis for expanding streams of commerce between the two nations.

10. The two leaders recognized the importance of protecting the most vulnerable populations while pursuing economic development and upholding international labor standards, including combatting child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.

11. President Obama welcomed President Bounnhang Vorachit's commitment to pursuing steps to uphold international labor standards that could pave the way for the United States to grant the Lao P.D.R. benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences.

#### *Education Cooperation*

12. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit affirmed the need to enhance educational, cultural, and people-to-people ties between the United States and Lao P.D.R. President Obama announced an initial basic education program, which focuses on improving early grade reading outcomes, and that Laos would be a Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund country, which would make Laos eligible for additional U.S. government funding for adolescent girls education. The two leaders noted the positive outcomes of the ongoing U.S. Government-funded School Feeding Program, for which the U.S. Government is currently providing over \$27 million in funding over five years. They remarked on the rapid growth of English language programs in Lao P.D.R. and confirmed that close cooperation on education and training are critical elements to the next phase of the relationship. The leaders noted that robust English language instruction would contribute to the Lao P.D.R.'s effective collaboration with other ASEAN nations for their mutual educational, cultural and social development as well as its competitiveness in the 21st century global economy. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit noted the success of bilateral education and exchange initiatives, especially the Fulbright program. The leaders noted the need for continued discussions on a Peace Corps program in Laos.

#### *Health and Nutrition*

13. The two leaders welcomed the establishment of the Lao-American Nutrition Institute, which will align with Laos's efforts to meet its Sustainable Development Goals, and ensure Lao children receive the nutrition they need for healthy lives. They also took note of a new three-year, \$6 million USAID program that will improve community sanitation and mother and infant feeding practices in targeted dis-

tricts, in line with the Lao government's Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan. President Obama reaffirmed the United States' commitment to providing further medical and other care and assistance for persons with disabilities, regardless of cause. President Bounnhang Vorachit expressed his appreciation for the U.S. government's continued support through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for Lao P.D.R.'s efforts to build sustainable systems for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care.

14. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit made a commitment to jointly advance the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), including formally endorsing the GHSA and through bilateral efforts to develop a five-year roadmap to bolster national capacity in Laos to prevent, detect, and respond to biological threats and to fully implement the International Health Regulations. As part of this commitment, Laos will join the GHSA multilateral effort in 2016 and will undergo and publish a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of its national capabilities. The United States has recently undergone and publically shared the results of its JEE.

#### *Environment*

15. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit affirmed the importance of addressing climate change and resolved to support robust and transparent implementation of the historic Paris Agreement. Following the United States formally joining the Paris Agreement, President Bounnhang Vorachit stated that the Lao P.D.R. has completed its domestic procedures to ratify the Paris Agreement and will formally join the Agreement this year. Both leaders called on all nations to support the Agreement's rapid entry into force in 2016. Both leaders affirmed their commitment to adopt an ambitious and comprehensive hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) phase-down amendment in 2016 within the Montreal Protocol, and support the adoption of a global market-based measure at the upcoming Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization for implementation from 2020.

16. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit welcomed increasing bilateral coopera-

tion to promote sustainable development and management of hydropower and forestry resources, as well as adaptation to climate change and response to natural disasters. The two countries pledged to promote a low greenhouse gas development pathway, including clean power sources that minimize environmental and climate impacts.

17. The two leaders also committed to work together, along with their LMI partners, to promote scientific research, capacity-building, investment, and dialogue to ensure the sustainable development of the Mekong River. They committed to increase cooperation to reduce wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes, in accordance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

### *Security*

18. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit confirmed that the United States and Lao P.D.R. would continue to cooperate on defense and security through annual Bilateral Defense Dialogues and associated working groups. The two Presidents committed to expand mutually beneficial cooperation to enhance capabilities such as UXO clearance, search and rescue and disaster response. The two sides also underscored the importance of enhanced cooperation in non-traditional security matters and confirmed that they would work more closely to counter terrorism; combat transnational crime including narcotics, human, and wildlife trafficking; and address high-tech crime and cyber security.

### Remarks in Vientiane, Laos September 6, 2016

*The President.* Thank you so much. Thank you. *Sabaidii!*

*Audience members.* *Sabaidii.*

*The President.* *Sabaidii bor?*

*Audience members.* *Sabaidii.*

*The President.* To the Government and the people of Laos, thank you so much for the kind welcome that you've extended to me and my delegation. I am very honored to be the first

### *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights*

19. President Obama and President Bounnhang Vorachit took note of the benefits of a candid and open dialogue to enhance mutual understanding and narrow differences on human rights. They emphasized the importance of protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and the rights of religious believers. In this regard, President Obama noted the crucial role of civil society. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to uphold the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States and Lao P.D.R. also committed to include informal consultation on human rights within the annual Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue.

### *People-to-People Ties*

20. President Bounnhang Vorachit and President Obama highlighted the importance of enhanced cooperation through strengthening people-to-people ties. They took note of the positive contributions that the people of the Lao P.D.R. and the United States, including the Lao-American community, can make to the strengthening of bilateral ties. The two leaders encouraged more people-to-people exchanges that focus on solving shared global challenges, with particular focus on encouraging youth leadership and entrepreneurship.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

American President to visit Laos. [Applause] Thank you.

Now, I am told that this hall is where you come together for the national singing contest. And I know that you celebrate your musical traditions, including *kap lam*. But I'm not going to sing today—[laughter]—so you should not worry. As you host leaders from across Southeast Asia and beyond, I do want to thank