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Summary record of the 46th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 18 September 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

(a) Reports submitted by States Parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

*Initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (E/C.12/LAO/1;
E/C.12/LAO/Q/1; E/C.12/LAO/RQ/1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic joined the meeting.*

2. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, introducing his country's initial report (E/C.12/LAO/1), said that significant reforms had been undertaken in March 2025 to enhance administrative efficiency and better respond to the country's socioeconomic and development needs. Shortly afterwards, the National Assembly had approved amendments to the Constitution that would improve the regulation of State affairs and strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Notable achievements in the area of economic, social and cultural rights had been made under the ninth National Socioeconomic Development Plan (2021–2025), and a tenth plan, for the period 2026–2030, was being prepared. The country had made progress towards graduating from least developed country status by 2026, as recommended by the Committee for Development Policy, but work remained to be done to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition. The Government had recently adopted a policy framework with a view to building a resilient and self-reliant economy with post-least developed country status.

3. Although the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a severe impact on the Lao economy, national economic growth for the period 2021–2025 was projected to average 4.24 per cent, and the national poverty rate had fallen dramatically, from 46 per cent in 1993 to 16.8 per cent in 2024. Substantial investments had been made to upgrade health infrastructure and improve healthcare services. As a result of efforts to achieve universal health coverage, the national health insurance system now covered 94.5 per cent of the population. Achievements in education included the expansion of the early childhood education network and the increase in enrolment among 5-year-old children. The legal and policy framework for the protection of labour rights had been strengthened, including through the revision of the Labour Law in 2013. Measures had also been taken to expand employment opportunities, increase women's participation in the workforce and improve workplace safety. The cultural rights of all 50 officially recognized ethnic groups were protected by the Constitution, and the Government placed great importance on preserving and promoting cultural heritage and promoting active participation in social and cultural life.

4. Despite the progress that had been made, the country continued to face significant challenges – such as climate change, economic uncertainties, and high levels of unexploded ordnance contamination – that hindered the full realization of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. The Government remained firmly committed to addressing those challenges, through economic support packages, increased investment in social sectors, and awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives, among other measures.

5. The Government also remained committed to engaging constructively with international and regional human rights mechanisms and had participated in numerous interactive dialogues with treaty bodies in recent years, as well as in the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. It had hosted visits to the country by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, in June and November 2024, respectively. Furthermore, the State had assumed the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights in 2024 and had made important contributions to enhancing the ASEAN human rights cooperation framework.

6. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to know what steps had been taken to incorporate the Covenant into the domestic legal framework and to ensure its primacy over domestic legislation. It would be helpful if the delegation could describe the

judicial remedies available to victims of rights violations and provide examples of recent cases in which citizens had obtained redress through the application of the Covenant by the courts. He would be interested to know what specific measures had been taken to raise public awareness of the rights enshrined in the Covenant and to provide training to public officials on the protection and implementation of those rights. He wondered whether the State Party was considering ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and if not, why. He would also appreciate information on any steps taken towards establishing a national human rights institution that was fully compliant with the Paris Principles.

7. In the light of reports that the executive branch exerted significant influence over the judiciary, he wished to know what measures were in place to safeguard, both in law and in practice, the independence and impartiality of the judiciary and the separation of powers between the executive and judicial branches; how judges were appointed; and what mechanisms relating to the appointment, promotion and security of tenure of judges had been established to ensure that judicial decision-making was free from political influence and any other form of pressure or interference.

8. He would like to know what steps were being taken to ensure that human rights defenders, activists and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were not subjected to harassment, intimidation or reprisals in the exercise of their activities and to ensure that all such violations were promptly and impartially investigated and those responsible were duly prosecuted and punished.

9. He would welcome information on the progress made towards adopting a comprehensive legal framework and a national action plan to ensure that all business entities exercised human rights due diligence in the conduct of their operations in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; as well as information, supported by statistical data, on the mechanisms in place to ensure that business entities carried out human rights impact assessments of their projects, particularly those involving mining, the construction of large infrastructure and the creation of special economic zones. He would like to know what remedies were available to victims of rights violations committed by business entities; and what had been done to address the deforestation, loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation caused by large-scale development projects carried out by both domestic and foreign companies.

10. He would appreciate information, supported by statistical data, on the progress made towards fulfilling the State's commitment under the Paris Agreement. It would be helpful if the delegation could give an overview of the measures taken in the areas of natural disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation; as well as the measures taken to address the slow-onset effects of climate change on agriculture, food security, water and sanitation, the environment and natural resources, and to protect vulnerable groups in that context.

11. He would welcome statistical data, disaggregated by age, sex, region and ethnic group, on the proportion of the population living below the poverty line, as well as information on measures taken to eradicate poverty and to increase the financial assistance provided to families living in extreme poverty and to members of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous Peoples. He would be interested to know what was being done to increase public expenditure and the proportion of the public budget allocated to social spending.

12. He wondered whether efforts were being made to rationalize fiscal policy in respect of both direct and indirect taxation and corporate tax revenue by establishing progressive tax rates in order to secure the economic, social and cultural rights of the poorer segments of the population. It would be helpful if the delegation could describe the nature and impact of any measures taken to address tax evasion and tax avoidance, especially by foreign corporate entities and the wealthiest members of the population. In the light of reports that corruption remained a widespread problem in the country and the country's comparatively low score in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, he would like to know what legislative, institutional and policy measures had been taken to effectively combat corruption, particularly in the areas of public procurement, land tax and judicial administration. He would appreciate information on any recent cases in which politicians, government ministers or

senior public officials had been convicted of corruption offences and on the measures in place to protect whistle-blowers and anti-corruption activists.

13. The Committee had received reports that ethnic minority groups and Indigenous Peoples, especially the Hmong people, were subjected to systematic discrimination and had been disproportionately affected by relocation and separation from ancestral lands and traditional ways of life. With that in mind, he would like to know what progress had been made towards the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that prohibited discrimination on all the grounds set out in the Covenant, including ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity; and what protective and remedial measures had been taken in response to the discrimination, violence and other human rights violations reportedly faced by Indigenous Peoples. He would appreciate clarification as to why some ethnic groups had been denied recognition and the right to self-identify as Indigenous Peoples; and what measures were in place to ensure the recognition and protection of the collective and traditional land rights of Indigenous Peoples. How did the Government ensure that LGBTIQI+ persons, women and ethnic minorities were protected from discrimination, stigmatization and other rights violations and had access to effective remedies?

14. It would be helpful if the delegation could describe the measures taken to ensure the effective implementation of gender equality legislation in both the public and private sectors; to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, especially those belonging to Indigenous Peoples; to close the gender wage gap and eliminate disparities between men and women across all sectors; to tackle the overrepresentation of women in the low-income and informal sectors; and to address the adverse effects of women's disproportionate engagement in unpaid domestic and care work. He would also be interested to know what was being done to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence, human trafficking, and early marriage and pregnancy; to challenge the traditional gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuated gender inequality; and to improve the representation of women at the higher levels of government and in high-income sectors.

The meeting was suspended at 3.30 p.m. and resumed at 3.40 p.m.

15. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, according to the law, international treaties must be transposed into national law before they could be implemented. The Government had received financial and technical support, including advice on best practices, from various international partners in its efforts to interpret the provisions of the Covenant and incorporate them into national law.

16. Although there was no comprehensive anti-discrimination law, provisions concerning discrimination featured in almost all the country's laws. Discrimination was also addressed through specific pieces of legislation, such as the Law on the Development and Protection of Women. The Government was required by law to ensure that all bills were submitted for public consultations involving a wide range of population groups, including vulnerable people and people living in remote areas. Bills were also published on the website of the Ministry of Justice.

17. Human rights training had been provided to judges and prosecutors since 2005. A manual had been developed, and training sessions on international human rights treaties had been held.

18. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that economic, social and cultural rights were protected by the Law on Civil Procedure, which stated that any individual or organization could lodge a claim with the courts to settle a dispute or to address a rights violation. In recent years, approximately 4,000 civil cases, 400 commercial cases, 1,200 family cases and 160 labour-related cases had been heard at the first instance, and around 1,250 civil cases, 200 commercial cases, 250 family cases and 20 labour-related cases had been heard by the courts of appeal.

19. Since the 1990s, the Lao People's Democratic Republic had been developing a system of rule of law. The Constitution and other laws, such as the Law on Civil Procedure and the Law on Criminal Procedure, guaranteed judicial independence. Judges adjudicated cases independently and without interference, strictly complying with the law. Judges were appointed by the National Assembly. After completing training at the National Institute of

Justice, prospective judges served as assistants for a period of three years, after which they were eligible to take an examination to become an entry-level judge. The law set out specific qualifications and criteria for judges at the different levels of the courts, including the highest judicial organ, such as the number of years served.

20. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that detention was regulated by the Law on Criminal Procedure and a number of presidential decrees. Emphasis was placed on the rehabilitation of detainees, and the Government had invested in improving the material conditions of detention, including through the construction of four new prisons, two of which had been completed in 2021, to reduce overcrowding. Prisons were equipped with family meeting rooms and health centres, and prisoners requiring more specialized treatment were transferred to hospital.

21. As part of the annual clemency exercise for 2025, the President had received proposals from the Government to pardon around 2,300 prisoners, commute the life sentences of 30 prisoners and authorize the early release of another 300.

22. Drugs offences carried heavy penalties, leading to the imprisonment of large numbers of people. Although no executions had taken place since 1989, 838 prisoners remained on death row. Every year, between 10 and 20 such prisoners had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

23. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that there were no plans to establish a national human rights institution. Instead, the Government was focusing on strengthening the National Committee on Human Rights, which was responsible for ratifying international treaties and overseeing their implementation and the related monitoring and reporting requirements. Specific areas or issues were addressed by the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities and the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee. Institutional arrangements were reviewed periodically.

24. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that 2,300 megaprojects, including hydropower plants and mining facilities, had been or would be completed. The relevant environmental and social impact assessments were conducted, and all legislation on investment promotion, land, environmental protection and natural resources was strictly enforced. Before project permits were issued, stakeholder meetings were held at the village, provincial and central levels. Where applicable, compensation was approved by the provincial authorities and paid to affected communities in accordance with the provisions of the relevant land regulations. Land was provided to people who needed to be resettled to accommodate megaprojects. Foreign nationals could be granted land concessions for a period not exceeding 50 years.

25. There were no Indigenous Peoples in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. All ethnic groups had equal rights to the use of land. According to the regulations on customary land use, anyone who used a parcel of land continuously for a period of 20 years, as certified by the relevant authorities, was entitled to compensation if that land was affected by a development project.

26. A national strategy and national action plan had been developed to mitigate climate change impacts. Other instruments in place included a green growth strategy, a carbon credit decree and natural disaster management legislation. In 2021, a vulnerability assessment exercise had been completed in all 148 districts, enabling the design of climate change mitigation measures.

27. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, as a result of anti-corruption efforts, his country had risen from 164th place in 2020 to 114th place in 2024 in the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International. Approximately \$70 million had been recovered during the prosecution of 56 corruption cases between 2022 and 2024. A further 200 cases remained pending, 40 of which had been submitted to the prosecution service.

28. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that approximately 20 per cent of ministers and parliamentarians and 70 per cent of provincial governors were women. In an effort to encourage more women to enter high-level government positions, a plan had been developed to ensure that, by 2030, 35 per cent of leadership positions in the National Assembly would be occupied by women.
29. A national action plan had been devised for the provision of assistance to victims of trafficking in persons. The plan included the establishment of a commission and the introduction of six programmes.
30. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that 50 ethnic groups coexisted harmoniously in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Anyone who committed a criminal offence was prosecuted according to the law, with no distinction made on the basis of ethnicity.
31. **Mr. Caunhye** said that he wished to know what the State Party was doing to afford effective protection against and adequate compensation for forcible eviction, relocation and land-grabbing cases and the impact of environmental degradation, in particular the water and food security of Indigenous Peoples and the effect on their health and livelihoods, caused by large infrastructure projects such as the dams constructed on the Mekong River.
32. The delegation might provide an update on any compensation that had been provided to the victims of the 2018 Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy dam collapse, following reports that the Government had received a payout of \$91.2 million from the project developers.
33. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he wished to know whether the State Party intended to repeal the legal provisions that allowed for the death penalty.
34. He would like to know how the Government planned to address the high national debt, which currently stood at 100 per cent of the gross domestic product and hindered the effective fulfilment of Covenant rights, including the construction of schools.
35. The delegation might describe any grievance mechanisms that were in place to enable the victims of the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy dam collapse to appeal and seek redress.
36. He wished to know whether the State Party planned to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the latter of which it had signed more than 15 years earlier. The delegation might provide statistics on the number of enforced disappearances that had occurred in the State Party.
37. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what measures were being taken to increase the resources directed towards the realization of the rights provided for in the Covenant, what was being done to assess the impact of debt servicing on the enjoyment of those rights and what safeguards were in place to ensure that debt servicing did not result in a reduction of the budgets earmarked for education, health, adequate food and water and social security. It would be interesting to learn what measures would be taken to ensure that the State Party's negotiations with creditors such as China and the International Development Association were transparent, involved human rights impact assessments and took into account the need to safeguard the public financial resources required for the realization of the rights under the Covenant. She wondered whether the State Party intended to review the fees charged for the exploitation of natural resources in order to ensure that they reflected the environmental and social costs of the activities concerned.
38. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that all the human rights treaties to which his country was a State Party had been translated into Lao and compiled in a document that had been widely disseminated and used in training courses for central and local government officials. The Lao People's Democratic Republic would not ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance until the Government had carefully studied the instrument and its consistency with domestic laws, held the relevant consultations and run capacity-building programmes to ensure that public officials had the knowledge required to implement it. Other issues to be addressed included budgetary constraints and a lack of human resources, which had led to the late submission of a number of national reports under the human rights treaties.

39. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the key principles enshrined in the Constitution and other relevant laws included unity in diversity, equality before the law and non-discrimination. In accordance with those principles, all ethnic groups enjoyed the same legal status, rights and protections. Special statuses, such as that granted to Indigenous Peoples in other countries, were not, therefore, recognized in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

40. The equality of men and women was provided for in the Constitution and other laws concerning family and marriage. Information on marital rights and the role of the family in society was set out in paragraph 67 of the periodic report. LGBTQI individuals had the same rights and duties as other citizens and could enter into relationships without fear of prosecution or punishment.

41. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that national laws were currently being aligned with international standards on business and human rights, including the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. References to the Declaration and provisions on responsible business conduct and environmental, social and governance issues would be integrated into a new five-year plan on the topic. Technical assistance and funding for projects aimed at building capacity in the area of responsible business conduct were provided by a number of international partners, who were also helping to develop the national plan on that matter.

42. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government had established a committee to work with the provincial authorities to ensure that individuals affected by the collapse of a dam built as part of the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy hydroelectric project received compensation. More than \$55 million had been awarded to those individuals, many of whom had lost loved ones, houses or businesses. Some of those funds had been used to rebuild infrastructure and repair the environmental damage. People who wished to move back to the affected areas were supported in gaining new skills in order to ensure that they would be able to earn a living.

43. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that officials holding various senior positions, including a provincial vice-governor, had been prosecuted for corruption. The number of offences that were punishable by death had been reduced to 12. Due process was followed in all death penalty cases. Death sentences could not be handed down to persons under 18 years old or pregnant women. The Government would continue to work with the authorities in neighbouring countries to improve compliance with the relevant article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

44. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that efforts to modernize the agriculture and forestry sector and improve infrastructure and production processes in the industrial sector had helped drive economic growth. The services sector was also continuing to grow, and there had been a record increase in the revenue collected through taxes on goods and imports. The Government was taking steps to tackle public debt by renegotiating with creditors in order to secure enhanced repayment conditions and mobilizing funds from a variety of sources, with a view to ensuring timely debt servicing.

45. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the budget earmarked for education had decreased owing to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the Government's financial resources. In view of that situation, the Ministry of Education and Sports had decided to focus its efforts on a number of priority areas.

46. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in 2025, the Government had allocated a budget of 2,500 billion Lao Kip to the health sector, which accounted for approximately 7 per cent of total government spending.

47. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in 2021, the Government had allocated approximately 12 per cent of its total public expenditure to the education sector, and the average budget allocation for education had ranged between 10 and 13 per cent for the period up to 2025 under the budget plan.

48. **Ms. Lee** said that she would like to know what measures had been taken to promote the creation of decent employment opportunities, including in rural areas, and would welcome disaggregated data on the impact of those measures on young people, women, persons with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities. The delegation might explain what was being done to address the factors that pushed young people to migrate and to ensure that individuals who had migrated abroad had access to safe and decent jobs upon their return to the State Party. It would be useful to learn what steps had been taken to align the State Party's laws with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), guarantee the effective prevention and punishment of the worst forms of child labour and tackle the root causes of that phenomenon. She would appreciate information on the measures taken to ensure that all workers, including those engaged in informal jobs, were covered by the laws on matters such as the minimum age of employment, working hours, paid leave, occupational health and safety, workplace harassment and violence and access to remedies.

49. She was curious to know what methodology was used to set the minimum wage, what measures had been taken to ensure that that wage was regularly adjusted based on the cost of living and what was being done to progressively extend the scope of minimum wage regulations to cover workers in the informal economy. She would be grateful for a description of the measures introduced to protect workers in special economic zones from forced labour, trafficking in persons, passport confiscation and coercive working conditions and to ensure that victims of labour exploitation or trafficking were able to file complaints without fear of retaliation and had effective access to remedies and information on their rights. It would be helpful to know what steps were being taken to strengthen the labour inspection system and extend its coverage to informal workplaces and special economic zones, what procedures were in place to enable workers to submit confidential complaints to the labour inspectorate and what had been done to ensure that labour inspectors could work without interference.

50. The delegation might comment on what was being done to ensure that workers could freely establish and join independent trade unions, including those that did not form part of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, and to guarantee that workers who attempted to exercise their trade union rights were effectively protected from reprisals, sanctions or dismissals. She wondered whether people living in poverty had access to social assistance programmes and, if so, whether such programmes covered all groups in the State Party and provided sufficient benefits to ensure that everyone could enjoy a decent standard of living. It would be helpful to learn, too, what steps had been taken to expand the social security system to cover informal, agricultural and domestic workers.

The meeting was suspended at 5.10 p.m. and resumed at 5.15 p.m.

51. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government recognized the critical challenges arising as a result of the predominance of informal jobs. The Law on Workforce Skills Development had been adopted with a view to enhancing job opportunities, protecting workers' right to a fair wage and establishing the obligation for all employers to conduct skills assessments to ensure that their workers received pay that was commensurate with their skill level. The second phase of the National Strategy on Social Protection, to be launched in 2026, would be geared towards ensuring the equitable, effective and sustainable delivery of basic social protection services, including the health insurance and social security schemes. The Labour Law would be amended to strengthen workers' rights.

52. The Government was investing in vocational training and employment services for informal workers, encouraging entrepreneurship and promoting gender equality and inclusion in the workplace in line with the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the ILO Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) and the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). It had put in place a voluntary social security scheme for informal workers. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was working closely with farmers to encourage the formation of cooperatives, to be used to facilitate farmers' access to the State social security scheme.

53. Recognizing that an adequate minimum wage was essential for labour protection and social equity, the Government had adjusted it periodically in response to the inflation rate

and other economic factors. In September 2024, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had announced that, as of October 2024, the minimum wage would be increased from 1.6 million Lao Kip per month, which had been found to be insufficient to meet rising living costs, to 2.5 million Lao Kip per month. The increase reflected the Government's commitment to strengthening income security and reducing poverty among informal and low-skilled workers in particular. To determine the new minimum wage, a specialist team had first gathered and analysed data on wage levels and living costs for sample groups of workers in the industry, agriculture and services sectors, taking into account changes in the inflation rate and consumer price index in the period 2018–2024. The team's findings had then been submitted to a tripartite committee consisting of governmental, employers' and workers' representatives that had been established to ensure that decisions taken reflected both economic realities and social needs. The Government was taking steps to ensure compliance with the minimum wage that included conducting capacity-building activities for labour inspectors and an awareness-raising campaign to inform workers of their rights. Although the new minimum wage remained lower than it was in neighbouring countries, the increase represented progress towards alignment with the regional standard. The Government had recommended that companies should review their labour policies to assess the potential impact of the new minimum wage on their operations. In the longer term, the Government would review the Labour Law, with a view to improving transparency, enforcement capacity and alignment with international standards in wage setting.

54. The employment rights of foreign nationals were governed by the Labour Law and a ministerial decision to regulate work permits for foreign workers in the country. The Government had signed memorandums of understanding that provided protections for its own nationals working in Thailand, South Korea and Japan, and was in negotiations to sign such agreements with other destination countries. It encouraged its nationals to ensure that they had the proper permission to work abroad. The Lao People's Democratic Republic wished to reaffirm its commitment to eliminating child labour in line with the Constitution and other national laws and its international obligations.

55. A survey on child labour conducted in 2022 had found that 25.9 per cent of children were engaged in economic activity, 10 per cent in child labour and 3.8 per cent in hazardous work. Those findings had underscored the need for urgent action. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had ratified and aligned its national law in that area with the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), and the ILO Convention No. 138. While children could perform light work from the age of 12, the minimum age for employment was 15, and persons under 18 were strictly prohibited from performing hazardous work. A list of 23 hazardous occupations that were prohibited to children in line with ILO standards had been adopted under a ministerial agreement in 2023. In addition, the Government had developed an action plan for the prevention and elimination of child labour for the period 2025–2030 and was taking steps to mainstream its elimination in other plans, particularly the Labour and Social Welfare Development Plan for the period 2026–2030. A strong emphasis was placed on education, vocational training and social protection as part of such efforts. Primary education was of vital importance, with an enrolment rate of 98 per cent.

56. A national labour inspectorate had been established, more than 150 inspectors had been appointed throughout the country, and procedures for conducting inspections, including urgent inspections on request, had been adopted under a ministerial decision. Only between 10 and 15 per cent of cases arising from such inspections resulted in court proceedings, with 80 per cent being resolved by committees for labour dispute resolution.

57. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that efforts had been made to raise awareness of the law on trafficking in persons among the media and in areas with a high rate of that crime to help protect at-risk people. The Lao Women's Union in particular provided victims with shelter and legal assistance and helped to reunite them with their families. Between 2021 and 2025, the Lao Women's Union had assisted 400 victims of trafficking in persons and pursued compensation for victims in court cases. In recent years, the Union used funding from the public and organizations to expand its network of shelters to six provinces. It had cooperated with relevant organizations to provide training in livestock and plantation skills to women victims of trafficking and to help them obtain loans and employment to improve their livelihoods, care for their families and avoid

becoming repeat victims. The country was a party to international agreements on combating trafficking in persons that it had concluded as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and trilaterally with Vietnam and Cambodia, in addition to cooperating in that area bilaterally with Vietnam, Thailand and China.

58. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in recent years, the Government had used State and international funding to provide school lunches and boarding school arrangements for the poorest students with a view to reducing the dropout rate. Students who had dropped out of school were provided with advice and were permitted and encouraged to return to education, including lessons and activities held outside normal school hours and technical and vocational training. The Government had developed a number of measures to improve education but had a limited budget for implementing them.

59. **Mr. Palmisano** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome more information about the range of penalties applicable in cases of child marriage and how effectively they were applied, together with data demonstrating the impact of measures taken to prevent such marriages. Given that, according to a recent United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey, nearly two in three children aged 1 to 14 in the country experienced some form of violent discipline at home, he wondered what measures the State Party had taken to address the issue of violence against children, whether school curricula throughout the country included such measures and whether training to help enforce existing child protection laws and regulations was provided at relevant institutions. He would like to receive more information on steps taken to protect children and other family members who were victims of trafficking in persons or sexual exploitation, particularly in the northern provinces of the country and certain special economic zones. He wondered whether services other than the dedicated helplines had been set up to assist victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation and meet their needs across the country. He would appreciate information about programmes developed and other steps taken to address troubling problems such as child malnutrition and multidrug-resistant malaria.

60. Given that malnutrition continued to disproportionately affect certain groups in rural areas, particularly in the most vulnerable provinces in the south and north of the country, and that food security had been negatively affected by the economic and financial crisis and extreme weather events, he wondered whether the State Party had adopted targeted measures to enhance food security in the most vulnerable regions and rural areas and what steps were being taken to make the food system more resilient in the face of extreme weather events and climate change. He would welcome up-to-date information on the steps taken to ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation, particularly in informal settlements and rural areas, and clarification as to whether the authorities carried out consultations and assessments before implementing water resource management schemes to ensure that such initiatives did not hinder local communities' access to safe water.

61. In the light of the current sharp increase in the price of medicines in the country, which had been driven by inflation and had resulted in the State health budget effectively losing half of its purchasing power, he wished to receive information about the State budget allocated to health in recent years and whether it had been increased in response to rising inflation and living costs. He wondered whether the national health insurance scheme introduced in 2016 now covered Vientiane and, if not, when it would cover at least the poorest segments of the city's population. He would appreciate clarification as to whether measures to raise awareness of the scheme had been taken to ensure that the entitlements of beneficiaries were clear, particularly for those living in poverty and rural areas. He wished to know what steps had been taken to improve the accessibility and quality of healthcare in rural and remote areas, where a high proportion of non-Lao-Tai groups lived, particularly with regard to hospital infrastructure, equipment and qualified medical and healthcare staff.

62. **Ms. Lee** said that she would appreciate the delegation's comments on the apparent absence of provisions in Lao law establishing the right to strike and prohibiting anti-union discrimination. She would like to receive clarification as to whether the State Party had a social assistance programme to ensure that people living in poverty enjoyed a minimum number of rights and what steps it planned to take to extend social protection schemes to people working in the informal economy. She wondered what steps the State Party had taken to amend the Labour Law to explicitly prohibit sexual harassment and related misconduct in

the workplace by any persons who might commit such acts and what measures were in place to ensure that victims of sexual harassment had access to safe and confidential complaint mechanisms, effective remedies and material and psychological support services. She wished to know what steps the State Party had taken to ensure that all persons, including the Hmong people, had access to the identification documents needed to benefit from social protection schemes.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.