ANNOUNCEMENT

With Reference to:

- In order to carry out and implement the 8th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan to 2020 of the Lao People's Democratic Republic;
- Overarching National Policy on Water and Sanitation for Lao PDR: (XXX specific targets)
- Based adopted agreements at the 12th High Level Round Table Meeting in Vientiane Capital on 27th November 2015, including the Guide to Development Action to 2025 and the Vientiane Partnership Declaration;
- Based on Lao PDR's stated commitments at the High Level Meeting on Sanitation and Water for All in Washington DC, USA in 2014;
- Based on Lao PDR's stated commitments to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, specifically Goal 6.2: By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations;

The Minister Issues this Announcement to:

- Provincial and District Ministers of Health nationwide
- Provincial and District Nam Saat Heads and Staff nationwide
- Provincial and District Nutrition Focal Points nationwide
- National Committee for Mother’s Children
- National, Provincial and District Lao Women’s Union
- National, Provincial, and District Lao Front for National Reconstruction
- Provincial and District, Centre for Information and Education on Health Heads and Staff nationwide
- Heads of Departments in National Ministries, Universities, Hospitals, Public and Private Institutions nationwide

The Ministry of Health presents the opportunity to hereby releases the following notice nationwide:

Lao PDR's Ministry of Health is preparing to mobilize health workers and volunteers nationwide to notify and remind citizens, families and communities throughout the country of the need to end the practice of open defecation and take actions to begin using improved sources of sanitation. As presented and evidenced in the references above, the importance of improved sanitation is imperative. It is especially vital to people's health, especially children and their development, and the continued social and economic development of our country. It is thus a renewed, urgent priority for the Lao Ministry of Health and Lao Government nationwide.

This mobilization effort will be carried out under the national campaign banner “The Opportunity to Advance”. This campaign mobilizes not only the forces of the Ministry of Health, but also involves deployment of thousands of volunteers from the Lao Women’s Union and Lao Front for National Reconstruction as well as trained sales people from public and private construction supply vending sites.

To those notified in this letter and those under their leadership, it is our collective responsibility to urgently promote, encourage, facilitate and advocate the use of improved sanitation and to make every village, district and province in Lao PDR “Open Defecation Free” by the year 2030. The key messages to be promoted in this campaign will focus on increasing dialogue at all levels of Government and society on the importance of using improved sanitation for family and community health as well as the practical, affordable steps available to help families to construct latrines and contribute to healthy, clean, and prosperous communities.

Signed and Sealed
OPEN DEFECATION perpetuates the vicious cycle of disease and entrenched poverty. The practice has serious impacts on health, time use, the environment, and tourism. It fosters the spread of diseases and causes under-nutrition, stunting and death, particularly for the most vulnerable.

As a consequence, Lao PDR is falling behind on a variety of development goals, especially those related to nutrition, health, education, and child survival.

**EDUCATION**

Poor sanitation in schools influences rates of enrolment, attendance, retention and learning achievement, particularly affecting girls and those living in rural areas.

**CHILD SURVIVAL**

In Lao PDR, inadequate sanitation and hygiene causes at least 3 million disease episodes and 6,000 premature deaths annually. Young children, especially, are most vulnerable to the ill effects of poor sanitation and hygiene. Diseases, such as diarrhea, account for about 39% of deaths in children under the age of five.

**GENDER EQUALITY**

Poor sanitation creates gender inequality, which is linked to poverty and discrimination. Sanitation is a matter of health, dignity, safety, and educational and economic opportunities for women and girls.

**ECONOMY**

In 2006, Lao PDR lost an estimated LAK 1.9 trillion (USD 193 million) due to poor sanitation and hygiene, equivalent to approximately 5.6% of gross domestic product (GDP). Poor sanitation places a burden on the country’s workforce and drains public health services.

**HEALTH AND NUTRITION**

Open defecation contributes heavily to health issues in Lao PDR. As much as 50% of malnutrition is associated with repeated diarrhea or intestinal worm infections as a result of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and/or insufficient hygiene.

**OPEN DEFECATION AND STUNTING**

Children living in rural villages of Lao PDR where community members defecate in the open are 1.1 cm shorter than children living in rural villages where everyone uses improved sanitation. This difference is irreversible and impacts a child’s cognitive development and future productive potential.

**OPEN DEFECATION AFFECTS NUTRITION**

- Open defecation practices contaminate water supplies and food crops in fields
- Coupled with poor hygiene, open defecation causes faecal contamination at meals
- Contamination can result in gastrointestinal infections
- Infections can cause diarrhoea which leads to loss of nutrients
- Over time, this leads to malnutrition

**KEY MESSAGES**

The importance of a latrine:

- A latrine is often more affordable than many people think
- There are practical solutions to helping communities ensure every family has its own latrine
- Latrines directly contribute to district, provincial, and national-level health and nutrition development goals

Ending open defecation:

- is a priority in Lao PDR’s 8th Socio Economic Development Plan
- contributes to healthy, clean, and prosperous communities
- contributes to the promotion of gender inequality, and in turn ending poverty and discrimination.
- is a matter of dignity, safety, and educational and economic opportunities, especially for women and girls
- is a priority for improving the health and development of young children, leading to improved futures for families and communities
- empowers children, especially girls to spend more time in school and improving their chances of completing their educations

Open defecation is a cause of serious health issues in children, leading to irreversible impacts on their future potential.