

## Development partners praise Laos' embrace of international law

\*(**VientianeTimes**): Development partners have praised Laos for its progress in integrating with the international legal system, and encouraged the government to continue its efforts towards building a state governed by the rule of law. Representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Union (EU) and Finland made the call at a meeting held in Vientiane on Friday to review the International Law Project-Laos for the period January-December 2011.



From left) Ms Helena Ahola, Mr Minh Pham, Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun and Dr Stephan Lock co-chair the meeting

“The project has helped Laos to participate and respond successfully in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR),” UN Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative to Laos Mr Minh Pham said. Since its inception in 2001, the International Law Project has been supported by the UNDP, the government of Finland and the European Union, with the aim of enhancing the participation of Laos in the international legal system. Its focus was a comprehensive capacity development programme to help Laos meet the demands of its increasing participation in international treaties and international law more generally. The current phase (phase 3) began in 2009 and will run until next year.

According to a report on the project, there has been significant progress in terms of national training in higher education on international law. Eighty percent of Lao law teachers are now able to deliver lectures in international law and human rights. Human rights laws are now incorporated in the teaching curriculum in three out of five Lao law schools, and a book defining the Lao perspective on human rights is being authored by local legal experts. “As a result of the advocacy

and intervention of the project, Laos is now among the leading nations in the region in terms of having signed and ratified international treaties - particularly in the field of human rights,” Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun said.

Officials are currently working on the development of a national action plan on the implementation of the UPR Recommendations. The UN representative was confident that the project will produce concrete results and progress on the implementation of the recommendations. First Secretary and Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Laos, Dr Stephan Lock, suggested that the project should focus on educating provincial and district authorities about international law, as at the moment it is confined to the central government level. He was hopeful that next year’s Asia-Europe Meeting Summit in Vientiane will be a showcase in terms of the understanding and embrace of international law by the Lao people, especially the fact that parliamentarians and civil society will participate in a sideline meeting at the summit. In her comments, Counsellor and Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Finland to Thailand and Laos, Ms Helena Ahola, suggested that Laos should strive to improve its capacity and knowledge in many fields, not only international law.

