Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2017

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

Thank you for your leadership to ensure adequate attention is placed on U.S. efforts to clean up unexploded ordnance on foreign soil. As you craft the Fiscal Year 2018 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, we respectfully request you include not less than $30 million for Laos demining within the Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) section of the Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR).

In one of the most enduring yet least well-known legacies of the Vietnam War, unexploded ordnance (UXO) left over from the nine-year U.S. bombing campaign over Laos is still endangering villagers as they go about their daily tasks. Between 1964 and 1973, more than 270 million cluster bomblets were dropped on Laos. This is more than was dropped on Germany and Japan combined during the Second World War. The U.S. flew more than 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, the equivalent of one bombing mission every 8 minutes around the clock for nine years. Less than one percent of the estimated 80 million leftover bombs in Laos has been cleared, resulting in more than 20,000 casualties since the war ended in 1975. On a per capita basis, Laos is the most heavily bombed country in history.

UXO in Laos continues to impede development in one of the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific. The UN Development Program has reported that "UXO/mine action is the absolute pre-condition for the socio-economic development of Lao[s]" and that because of UXO "economic opportunities in tourism, hydroelectric power, mining, forestry and many other areas of activity considered main engines of growth for Laos are restricted, complicated and made more expensive." Today, an estimated 80 million unexploded cluster bomblets litter forests, rice fields, villages, school grounds, roads and other populated areas— hindering development and poverty reduction efforts.

In the last 20 years, the United States has contributed more than $100 million toward clearance operations and mines risk education in Laos, as casualties have dropped from over 300 a year to an average of 50 per year, 40 percent of whom are children. Last year marked a significant turning point in U.S.-Lao Relations since 1973. On September 6, 2016, President Barack Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Laos where he pledged $90 million over three years in continued assistance, including a national survey of UXO, saying "the United States has a moral obligation to held Laos heal" from the legacy of war. Our request for $30 million in consistent with that pledge.

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Congress has specifically recognized the responsibility of the U.S. to prioritize the "clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in areas where such ordnance was caused by the United States," including $19.5 million in FY 2017 for Laos. We have a moral obligation to resolve this dark chapter in history, which still threatens the lives and livelihood of the Lao people, many of whom were born two generations after the war ended. Following through with the $30 million commitment for FY 2018 will enable the U.S. to build a new and lasting legacy of peace out of the shadows of a war that ended over 40 years ago and send a message to Laos and others in the region that the U.S. keeps its promises. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

SEAN DUFFY
Member of Congress

BETTY McCOLLUM
Member of Congress

LLOYD SMUCKER
Member of Congress

NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ
Member of Congress

PETER WELCH
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