



**FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL CONCORD  
IN LAOS**



Presented by His Royal Highness  
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*Translated from the original*



## INTRODUCTION



*The Communists came to power in Laos in December 1975, thus abolishing constitutional monarchy, along with the Provisional Government of National Unity. The 'Lao People's Democratic Republic' was proclaimed shortly afterwards so as to establish a communist and totalitarian regime. Their Majesties, the King and the Queen, as well as the Crown Prince, were put under arrest and deported to an unknown destination. The rest of the Royal Family was forced to flee and seek refuge in countries favorable to their cause.*

*Nineteen years later, today's situation in Laos can only be assessed with concern and sadness. National identity is progressively dying out. Peace is impossible to enforce. National unity is still far from being realized. Independence is nothing but an empty word. The Lao people are still denied genuine democracy.*

*The central governing body that has been set up by the Communists cannot control local authorities in the provinces any longer. The specter of a 'war of secession' is seriously looming on the horizon. The politico-military guerrilla organizations, which were the result of the rejection of both foreign occupation and communism, are increasingly enjoying the support of the population nationwide. The 500,000 Lao refugees that are now scattered throughout the world are intensifying their struggle for democracy as well as their efforts to secure a return to their homecountry in dignity.*

*Today's Laos, whose economic growth under the current regime has slowed to what it was several decades ago, has to face political, demographic, cultural and economic pressures as exerted by some neighboring states. Several breaches have already appeared and it is no longer possible to stand up to the craving for expansion of those countries.*

*Nowadays the existence of Laos as a sovereign State is being threatened. It is, therefore, urgent that Laotians of all political alignments unite to work towards a new start based on national reconciliation and unity.*

*The Lao Royal Family is at the disposal of the Lao people as a whole and hopes that it will succeed in reestablishing its Unity, its Independence and its Freedom.*

*After recalling a few facts and events, we will explain why national reconciliation is essential to the survival of the Lao Nation. As a conclusion, we will enumerate the first proposals that were delineated after consulting many of our compatriots.*





## **KEY FACTS AND EVENTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LAOS.**

The Kingdom of Laos dates back more than a millenium. A single dynasty reigned from 729 to 1975. The fact that it respected wisdom, justice and common law justified its legitimacy.

At the King's request, Laos was placed under French protectorate in December 1893 to safeguard it from foreign invasions. A democratic Constitution, which saw to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, was issued on May 11, 1947. The unity of the Kingdom was thus achieved not long after.

On July 19, 1949, the French-Laotian General Convention was signed : it established the Independence of Laos within the French Union.

On December 14, 1955, Laos became a UN member state. The legitimacy and legality of the Kingdom of Laos - both points which were never called into question - were thus permanently established.

Unfortunately, the wars between Vietnam and France and then between Vietnam and the United States of America did not leave the Kingdom unscathed. The Lao Communists, a.k.a. the Pathet-Lao, formed an alliance with their North-Vietnamese 'brothers' to try to take over Laos via a war of attrition. The fact that the peace accords were systematically broken led to the failure of the numerous attempts at conciliation. Even though the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Neutrality of Laos was supported by the Great Powers, it was not abided by.

The latest peace agreement - 'the Agreement on the Reestablishment of Peace and the Realization of National Concord in Laos' - was signed in Vientiane on February 21, 1973. It established a Provisional Government of National Unity that was to be abolished by a Communist putsch on December 2, 1975.

His Majesty King Sri Savang VATTHANA was forced to abdicate the throne on November 29, 1975. He was then sent to an unknown destination, along with the Queen, the Crown Prince and other members of the Royal Family.

Police roundups and arbitrary arrests plunged the whole country into a state of terror. Denouncement of the people against the regime prevailed. The population, made up of all levels of society and of all categories, e.g., farmers, officials, servicemen, workers, business executives, etc., were forced to brave the bullets fired by Communist soldiers as they swam or canoed across the Mekong River to escape. About a thousand of these fugitives died while attempting to escape and those remaining caused the receiving refugee camps in Thailand to overflow with people as they waited for a third country to receive them. Despite considerable efforts by the UNHCR, the refugee problem to this day has still not been entirely resolved. 500,000 nationals - more than 15% of the population - reportedly left the country while the deportation of civil and military officials from the



Royal Administration is being carried out within Laos. Concentration camps - the so-called 'seminar centers' - have been set up in the jungle to receive them. About a thousand of them have died in such camps.

Given the putschists' determination to completely exterminate the members of the Royal Family, the King's two daughters and his youngest son had to flee with their families to seek refuge in France. Their life there is similar to that of fellow refugees. Fortunately, they managed to find jobs enabling them to work for a living and send their children to school in spite of the country's high unemployment rate - more than three million people are out of work.

The Royal Family has kept working for the unity of all Laotians as well as for national reconciliation ever since it began its exile in France. Reestablishing the monarchy is not its main objective. Yet, if every party considers this institution as the symbol of national unity, as in the case of Cambodia, the Royal Family is then at the disposal of the Lao people.

Given the collapse of the communist bloc in 1990 and the recent, successful and peaceful settlement of the Cambodian issue, there seems to be some reason in hoping for the realization of national unity in Laos.

## **NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IS NECESSARY FOR BOTH THE REESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE LAO NATIONAL IDENTITY.**

### ***National Unity based on a democratic regime is essential.***

The provinces have been gaining more and more autonomy from Vientiane under the current Communist Regime. Their budget is different from that of the State and they may keep tax revenues for their own use. They appoint their own officials and run both the police and the military in their localities. They have more in common with an independent state than with a province. Their autonomy was such that the central government had to issue a decree in August 1991 to remind them of their provincial status. Unfortunately, this call to order was to no avail. Yet the Communist authorities refrained from intervening drastically to enforce the decree lest anti-Communist rebels side with the military forces of the provinces in armed conflicts.

Lao 'Communists' were totally unacquainted with the Communist ideology, Marx or Engels. In fact, their initial indoctrination was based on a nationalism fueled by anti-French and anti-American sentiments. This is no longer the case. The Lao Communists currently want to protect their own self-interests. In order to do this, they are apt to work with anyone solely to remain in power.





Sustained propaganda did not keep the population from increasingly losing confidence in the Communist authorities and of supporting local guerrilla organizations, which resulted from the rejection of both the regime and, most of all, present foreign occupation. There are several reasons for this. The Lao people are aware of the fact that their country's growth has severely regressed and slowed to what it was several decades ago. Poverty has worsened. Corruption prevails in every level of society. The working population is burdened by high taxes. Government officials are only paid a part of their wages. People are denied the right to travel and they cannot express opinions that are not in line with those of the only political party, i.e., the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) - a.k.a. Phak Pasasôn Pativat Lao'. Foreign interference with the military, the police and state agencies is conspicuous. Occupation troops have settled down at the outskirts of major cities. Although, the Lao people have often heard of international aid, but they have never seen the benefits of it. Even the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, along with the toppling of 'socialist' regimes in 'brother' countries, has had an impact on the population. Faced with these very disappointing events, the majority of the Lao people is convinced that their country is not heading in the right direction. That is the reason for the continuous widening of the gap between the people and the Communist Old Guard that is still clinging to power.

Outside the country, Lao refugees have continued to support, by all means available, the fight carried out by the guerrilla movements in Laos. They have created numerous politico-military organizations whose aim is to fund the purchase of weapons and to provide the guerrilla fighters with supplies. They represent a link between the fighters in Laos and the international organizations. Some of them stage armed conflicts from outside Laos. The persistence of conflicts in the neighboring states must not be forgotten either. Those include the Shan in Burma and the Kmers Rouge in Cambodia - to name only a few of them.

Even though the situation looks calm, it really is a tinderbox. H.R.H. Prince Sauryavong SAVANG, the Prince Regent of Laos, undoubtedly played an important role as he called for the reestablishment of peace on November 29, 1990. Unfortunately, this will not be a lasting peace if urgent steps are not taken to effect a reconciliation and bring back a national unity based on genuine democracy.

The latest happy developments in Cambodia have nurtured new hopes, and a peaceful, fair and lasting solution in such a favorable context is what everybody is looking forward to. Should such a solution fail, peace would be jeopardized in South-East Asia.

*The way towards national independence must not be hampered by guerrilla alliances with foreign occupation forces.*

Independence is what conveys real meaning to national identity. It enables a people



to be fully sovereign according to a democratic process. The Lao people want to decide for their country's future. They claim their right to self-determination.

The independence of Laos has been acknowledged by international organizations as well as numerous states all over the world. Yet the Vientiane government has not entirely been free to make its own decisions since 1975. Reestablishing national independence has become the priority.

The Lao Communists allowed allied military troops to go into Laos throughout the conflicts of the 1960s and '70s. Ever since they gained control of the country in 1975, they have not been successful in having those troops withdraw because the occupying forces always came up with good reasons to stay. The current Vientiane regime is having a hard time solving this problem.

As was the case in Cambodia, the withdrawal of foreign troops will only be made possible once a strong willingness to effect a national reconciliation supported by the international community has appeared.

***Laos must become a sovereign state endowed with the inalienable rights of self-government and self-determination.***

For Laos to join the international community, the creation of a sovereign state with a truly democratic constitution that would allow several political parties is necessary.

The Pathet-Lao administration has tried its best to reestablish a sovereign state. Laws and decrees were enacted to introduce reforms. Several measures - such as the promulgation of a constitution, a criminal code, criminal and civil procedure laws, labor regulations, etc. - have been implemented since 1989. Unfortunately, these have not lived up to government expectations. The people are wholly indifferent to the constitution the LPRP representatives promulgated. There is a wide discrepancy between people's opinions and those of the party apparatchicks. Law enforcement is difficult. Daily life shows that every citizen is not always equal in the eyes of the law. Law enforcement relies on people who are either members of the party or militia, may they be officials, workers or farmers, who specialize in denouncing opponents to the regime.

There is no adequate plan to control illegal immigration aside from the checking of tourist passports. The 4,606-km-long (2,879-mi) border is very vulnerable. Vietnam's population density is 215 inhabitants per sq.km. Thailand's is 113 and Laos' is 18. Those figures are self-explanatory. Laos is being subjected to real population pressures exerted by some of the neighboring states. As a result, the population increased from 3 million to 4.5 million inhabitants from 1975 through 1994. If the 500,000 nationals that have fled the country since 1975 were to be taken into account to compensate for internal growth, the immigration flow could be estimated at 1.5 million. The number of pre-1975 immigrants must also be considered : there are 2 million immigrants against 2.5 million nationals.



Estimates are also worse than that as the population is expected to reach 6 million inhabitants by 2000! Immigrants should integrate into Lao society, but what is taking place is the opposite. How can peace be reestablished under such circumstances?

The future of the Lao people is far from being good. In 1893 the King did not hesitate to place Laos under French protectorate to ward off foreign invasions. Can today's Laos rely on the international organizations or on well-balanced political and economic relationships with the countries that have an interest in their country? This question is likely to be answered in the negative if reconciliation and the realization of a national unity based on a truly democratic regime do not come into being.

### ***Economic growth is necessary for the survival of the Lao nation.***

The takeover of the Communist regime in 1975 has had a serious, negative impact on economic growth, which currently has deteriorated below the 1975 level. It is of the utmost importance that Laos strive to match present growth in line with that of neighboring countries.

As it implemented its 'New Economic Mechanism' policy, the Communist regime initiated the liberalization of the economy in 1986 and it speeded it up in 1989 after the Fifth Congress of the Lao People's Communist Party. The reform program sponsored by the IMF -International Monetary Fund- is composed of objectives similar to those delineated by the Bretton Woods agreements. The international economic aid received by Laos is very important :

1990	US\$ 107 million
1991	US\$ 138 million
1992	US\$ 134 million
1993	US\$ 129 million

In 1993 it represented 10.2% of GDP -gross domestic product. Compared to the size of the Lao economy, this aid is very significant since it is superior to US\$ 30 per capita - the highest level in SE Asia.

Results to this day are very disappointing both for the Lao people and donor countries which are now gradually reducing their aid as shown by the figures above. GDP growth is fragile :

1990	6.7%
1991	4.0%
1992	7.0%
1993	4.0%



The hundreds of millions of dollars worth of foreign aid have not contributed to creating conditions favorable to a higher growth rate since 1990. Thailand, for example, one of the bordering countries, boasts a superior rate that steadily increased : 7.5% in 1992 and 8% in 1993. Thailand's GDP per capita amounts to US\$ 2,000 against only US\$ 280 for Laos. Due to slower growth in Laos, this enormous gap between both countries will still widen in the future.

There are several reasons for this failure. The country's infrastructure communication routes in particular - is poor. Free circulation of goods and persons is mentioned in official texts, but it is not applied. Actually, the central government cannot manage to eliminate racketeering as it is practiced by local 'lords', who thus cause the prices of goods to be non-competitive.

Agriculture makes up for 58% of GDP. This sector is, however, very vulnerable. In 1993 rice production diminished by 17% due to a severe drought, which caused more than 10% of the population to suffer from serious food shortages. All the measures that were taken by the authorities to increase production were doomed because of a lack of security in the country. Those measures will go on being inefficient as long as no national reconciliation is effected.

Industry makes up for only 18.1% of GDP. The processing industry cannot be developed as labor is scarce and poorly skilled. The engineers that left the country to escape arbitrary arrests and deportation due to the Communists' coming to power in 1975 will only return home once a democratic regime has been established. The capital they will bring with them as well as the knowhow they acquired in industrialized countries will help compensate for the current lack of skilled labor.

Peace and security are prerequisites to the development of natural resources. The hydroelectric potential is estimated at 18,000 MW. Less than 300 MW are currently being produced, with difficulty. The building and operation of new dams are impossible without a prior peace settlement. The harvesting of the country's rich woodlands and extraction of high-grade ore is very dangerous due to the existence of anti-communist guerrillas.

The investment code that was promulgated in 1989 was not enough to attract foreign investment to boost the economy. No one is naive enough to invest in a country where there is serious risk of not getting returns on investment and of not being able to get the investment back. The few who did invest were frustrated by the government's inertia and the high level of corruption : their investment brought them nothing and they were left disappointed.

In view of those results, the Pathet-lao's 'liberal' economic policy can be said to have failed.





We showed that the survival of the Lao Nation is threatened under the current regime. Laos has a lot of resources that can help it develop itself. But they are being used in inappropriate ways. That is why reconciliation and national unity must be effected.

National reconciliation should take place under the aegis of the UN. A prominent Lao who would be accepted by all parties should preside over this process. A country whose rulers broke agreements they had previously agreed upon is not easily recognized by other sovereign States.

The European Parliament passed two resolutions - N°739 on 11/14/82 and N°129-734 on 1/19/89 - in line with the stance of the Great Powers : no lasting peace will prevail in South-East Asia as long as the Lao problem has not been settled permanently.



## **PROPOSALS FOR THE REESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND REALIZATION OF NATIONAL UNITY IN LAOS.**

1-All armed or non-armed foreign occupation forces shall withdraw under the supervision of the international community.

2-The 'Lao-Vietnamese Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation' that was signed in Vientiane on July 18, 1977, for a 25-year period, to be renewed every 10 years, shall be terminated. In the eyes of both the Lao people and the countries that are supportive of Laos, Laos is seen as being placed under Vietnamese protectorate - not only militarily, but also politically, economically and culturally - by this treaty. New friendship treaties could be negotiated after national reconciliation has been established in Laos.

3-There shall be general amnesty for and liberation of all political prisoners, both of the left and the right. Concentration camps - a.k.a. reeducation centers or seminar centers - shall be closed down.

4-All racial, ethnic and social discrimination as well as any pejorative distinction between the former regime and the new one shall be suppressed. The Human and Citizens' rights shall be abided by. Free circulation of persons and ideas shall be guaranteed as wished for by the Helsinki Treaty.

5-Many Laotians had to change nationalities to be allowed to work in their host countries. Some of these countries accept bi- or pluri-nationality. Former nationals shall automatically be given back their Lao nationality, immediately and free of charge.



Upon their request, Lao nationality shall be granted under the same conditions to those children born abroad of Lao parents.

6-Permanent talks with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and its leaders shall be established via governments of countries favorable to peace in Laos, or via non-government organizations, or directly with no intermediaries, if possible.

7-States favorable to the Laotian cause shall be approached for aids and bilateral recognition of the future, reconciled and democratic Laos.

8-Solutions and means to solve all of Laos' current problems shall be found and applied when national reconciliation is effected.

*However difficult this may be, the Lao Royal Family will carry on its efforts to reestablish Unity, Independence and Democracy in Laos, with determination and with the support of all of our fellow-countrywomen and fellow-countrymen.*