Country: Laos

Committee: CSW (Commission on the Status of Women)

Topics:” Assurance of Equal Pay for Services of Equal Derivative Values Between Men and Women”, “Extending the Reach of Economic Leadership of Developing Countries”, “Women’s İnvolvement in Global Politics”

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 Honorable chair and esteemed delegates,

I am a Laos delegate. Laos is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia's northeastern region. It is made up of an irregularly shaped northern part that narrows into a peninsula-like region stretching to the southeast. From northwest to southeast, the country spans around 1,050 kilometers. Vientiane, the country's capital, is situated on the Mekong River in the northwestern part of the country. With its forests, mountains, highland plateaus, and plains, the geologically diverse landform sustains an equally diversified population that is brought together by agriculture, primarily rice production. Between the 5th and the 19th centuries, interactions with the neighboring kingdoms of Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar filled Laos with elements of Indian culture, particularly Buddhism, which is currently practiced by the majority of the population. Both Buddhist and Hindu lore have influenced the country's artistic, performing, and literary arts. Many indigenous and ethnic peoples of the remote highland slopes and mountainous regions, however, have maintained their idiosyncratic rituals and artistic traditions.

The country’s population is around 7.2 million, and 53 percent of the people are Lao. The official language of Laos is Lao, although various foreign languages have often been used by the elite. French was once the language of the Lao upper classes and other cities, but by the 1970s, English had begun to displace it. Under the leadership of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, Vietnamese became the third language of the elite. Buddhism is the majority religion in Laos. The state religion of the pre-republic kingdom of Laos was Buddhism, and the clergy (sangha), a community of monks and novices, was organized similarly to the political hierarchy. Buddhists make up about half of Laos' population, mostly in the lowlands. Non-Buddhist local religions are practiced by about two-fifths of the population, particularly the Lao Theung and Lao Soung ethnic groups. However, Buddhism and local religions are not mutually exclusive; among the greater Buddhist community, there is both syncretic practice and a general tolerance for local religious traditions.

In essence, our flag has a meaning, and it represents freedom and justice throughout the land. The bloodshed incurred by the Lao people throughout their struggle for freedom and independence from the French is symbolized by the red stripes. The blue represents the Mekong River, which represents the nation's wealth. The white circle in the center represents justice and unity among the Lao people, as well as the country's bright future, under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. It's also thought to symbolize a full moon rising over the Mekong.

Laotian girls enroll in education at a lower rate than boys. Following WWII, many women, such as the Bai Hai silk weavers, became more involved in menial manual labor. Despite being less literate and educated on average than men (63 percent of Lao females can read and write compared to 83 percent of males), Lao women have increasingly become the primary income earners in their families, particularly in rural areas. This inequality is compounded by male-dominated cultural norms, poverty, racism and discrimination against ethnic groups, and a general lack of focus on female education. Among all child demographics, girls from minority ethnic groups have the lowest enrollment and completion rates. In Laos, more than half of the females from ethnic communities do not attend school. Many of these ethnic groups do not speak Lao. As a result, the children of these communities are unable to receive a proper education since educational resources are only available in Laos. Furthermore, girls from smaller ethnic communities are more likely to be poor and have fewer opportunities to attend school. In Laos, girls' education is improving, but slowly. Since 2005, the percentage of girls receiving primary education has increased by fewer than 0.5 percent per year. To help ease this poor growth, we are addressing the substantial gender gap in education by training female ethnic teachers in villages to deliver higher-quality education and outreach to a larger number of girls. Despite gradual progress, the gender gap in primary school attendance continues to narrow, particularly in metropolitan areas where attendance rates are practically equal. Even if progress is being made, views and policies continue to be a factor affecting women's equality. While the country is on schedule to attain gender parity among girls and boys by the end of 2015, the UN MDG report notes that this is changing as women get older. With college education, for example, the ratio drops to 77 girls per 100 boys.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has established a national institution to improve women's rights and gender equality. Gender equality has progressed in several areas, including education and health, where maternal mortality has decreased. A National Plan of Action on Violence Against Women and Children, as well as a policy on violence prevention, have been approved. The Lao People's Democratic Republic pledges to continue enforcing its gender equality policy, especially through national socioeconomic development programs, until 2030. At the Global Leaders' Meeting on September 27, 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith remarked, "I would want to restate the commitment of the Lao PDR to continue working closely with the international community to promote and enhance the role and status of women." Therefore, we are trying our absolute best to promote women's rights. Even though we have a mostly patriarchal society, after our current resolutions, we are hoping that the matter of women in our community will be more taken to attention and talked about.

Traditional beliefs and gender role stereotyping put women and girls in a submissive position, preventing them from having equal access to education and commercial possibilities, and the government did little to change this. Poverty continued to affect women disproportionately, particularly in rural and ethnic minority populations. While rural women performed more than half of all agricultural production in every field, the added responsibilities of home and child care were predominantly carried out by women. On the urban-rural divide, gender issues alter a little, although women are still generally considered caregivers and homemakers. Nonetheless, there are several chances for women, and many of them work and hold positions of influence in a variety of fields. Women make up the majority of small-time Lao traders. Women perform much of the long-distance trade in northwest Laos, crossing the border into China and Thailand to stock up on products and bring them to trading areas through the Mekong River and buses. These women have earned relatively high earnings, have status at home, and a surprising amount of social freedom while traveling. According to the I-TRAK report done by Indochina Research, 55% of respondents believe that women face more problems in the workplace than men. Domestic expectations to manage work-life and household, social attitudes about women in the office, and physical strength concerns in some more demanding positions were among the obstacles identified by respondents.

The Lao Women's Union, an organization operating throughout the country that works to train and support women to eliminate poverty and create economic stability, celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2015. While both the UN and ADB reports recognize that progress has been made in recent years, there is still much to be done. Only 52 percent of Lao women have paid employment in the capital, Vientiane, according to the I-TRAK Q3 Report, compared to 37 percent in the remainder of the country. In the capital, Lao women feel confident in their talents, with 95% of respondents firmly believing that women should play an equal role in the economy. The remaining 5% of respondents thought that women should only work when necessary. Meanwhile, a similar percentage of respondents (83 percent) feel that women have the same abilities as men and that they should be paid equally. The reduction in gender parity as women age can be linked to social views, which may explain the disparity in hiring practices between the capital and the rural. There are currently no regulations in place to protect against gender discrimination in the recruiting process. There are, however, laws in place to ensure that women have access to the same occupations and pay as males.

According to a survey, 47 percent of the 200 women interviewed were mothers, with many of them seeing childbearing as harming their professional life and vice versa. In fact, 55% of working mothers believe their employers do not give adequate maternity benefits. Maternity leave and allowances were the most pressing concerns for working mothers; 61% of respondents wanted longer maternity vacations and 59% wanted larger medical allowances. Mothers with older children want more flexible work hours (26%), as well as daycare facilities at their employer (26 percent).

Despite these challenges, Lao women have a strong entrepreneurial spirit and strive hard to achieve their goals. According to the I-TRAK report, 25% of the women interviewed want to start their own business over the next five years, while another 18% want to grow their present firm. Lao women also aim to achieve greater success in the future by pursuing further education and obtaining a promotion, Lao women are gradually realizing their ambitions, as per the data from the UN and the ADB report. We have closed 70% of the gender gap index, and by 2012, 25% of parliament members were women, the highest percentage in the region. Moreover, despite some respondents' perceptions of social stigma surrounding women in the workplace, Lao women are increasingly involved in corporate management as our government expands their chances. Indeed, according to the ADB Outlook 2015 study, Laos has a mean average of women in the boardroom that is comparable to the United States and Germany. Lao women are determined and hardworking to have a bigger role in the economy and more male-dominated sectors, and they will achieve these when they ate given more chances at it.

The best way to summarize is that working women in Laos are strong, ambitious, and more conscious of their social responsibility. They believe that they are on pace with males in terms of skill and opportunity for financial freedom. It is safe to predict that in the future years, Lao women will realize even more of their potential and will continue to play an important role in the development and progress of Laos.