

Committee on Environment and Development, 7th Session
Country Statement on Sustainable Urban Development

Remarks by Ms. Vilaykham Phosalath,
Vice Minister of MPWT

Your Excellency Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport of the Lao PDR, I would like to let you know briefly about our urban development on the previous session, in order to make it specify, allow me to explain why.

Excellencies,

Lao PDR bears some specific characteristics when it comes to urbanization. The country is simultaneously primarily rural and undergoing a fast urbanization. Half of the country's population will be living in urban areas within a decade or so. Such trend is transformational: urbanization will change Lao PDR and the lives of its citizens.

About 35% of Lao PDR's population lives in urban areas, but the pace of urban population growth is relatively fast, especially in Vientiane Capital. Therefore, proper urban planning and management can be a force for economic and social development. Dense urban living and proximity can lead to more creativity and increased productivity as scale gives rise to higher degrees of specialization, and cities can be made more environmentally friendly. However, unplanned urbanization and non-systematic urban management would create overcrowding and congestion, problems of sanitation, air pollution and inadequate recreational spaces.

Sustainable urban development is likely to be focused on developing urban hubs along economic corridors that transform Lao PDR's connectivity with the wider Greater Mekong Sub-region. This includes the north south corridor served by the N13 and, since December 2021, the Lao-China railway.

The challenge is to ensure transport and public works infrastructure and land use development is integrated creating viable and efficient growth hubs for industry, commerce, tourism and social inclusivity. Soft measures are also important including regulatory actions for areas such as waste management and capacity development.

Resilient, liveable and smart cities projects are progressing including GMS urban development projects at provinces north to south. We are progressing an urban environment investment improvement project at heritage city. Through ASEAN Smart cities network we are developing SMART city projects at downtown cities in Laos.

We commend ESCAP for its focus on sustainable urban development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions and for its recent support to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, along with UN-Habitat, for the first National Urban Forum which took place in October 2022 on the theme of 'resilient and inclusive urbanisation.'

We look forward to carrying the key messages from our National Urban Forum to the eight session of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum being hosted by Suwon, Republic of Korea, in October 2023 which will coincide with the launch of the next ESCAP flagship report on the future of Asia-Pacific cities.

We request that ESCAP increase its support to Laos and the Asia-Pacific region in the area of strategic urban planning area to accelerate achievement of SDG11 and our joint commitments to the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Once again, allow me to share my sincere congratulations to the organizers of this meaningful session. And we underline the importance for continued technical cooperation support from ESCAP in sustainable urban development, acceleration of SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities and localization of action for all SDGs in Laos and all ESCAP member States.

Thank you