

A cluster bomblet explosion reportedly killed one young girl and injured her sister on Wednesday, 10 November in Lao PDR.

According to the director general of Mittaphab Hospital in Vientiane, Dr. Vanliem Bouaravong, the two sisters, Paeng, aged 15, and Piou, aged 10, were returning from school in Thasala village, Khamkevt district, Bolikhamxay province, when the younger of the two reportedly picked up a cluster bomblet to show her sister, and then threw it back on the ground, where it exploded. Both girls were taken to the hospital in the capital, three hours away. The younger sister Piou bled to death 30 minutes after arrival, around 9 p.m. The surviving sister suffered from a knee injury and fragmentation in her neck, hand and hip, and is still being treated at the hospital.

The incident happened as more than 110 governments and 400 campaigners attend the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in the country's capital Vientiane, where they are expected to agree on a 65-point action plan to take concrete steps to clear land, destroy stockpiles and assist victims in the 35 countries and territories contaminated by these weapons. This meeting is a defining moment in the life of the treaty, which took effect as binding international law on 1 August 2010. The treaty comprehensively bans cluster munitions, and obliges states parties to destroy stockpiles of the weapons within eight years, clear contaminated land within 10 years and provide assistance to victims.

As the most heavily cluster-bombed country in the world, Lao PDR is a strong example of why urgent action is needed. During the Vietnam war, the US dropped more than 270 million cluster submunitions on Lao PDR, about a third of which failed to explode. They still affect a quarter of all villages in the country.

The Lao PDR government estimates that unexploded ordnance from the war still kills and injures 300 civilians a year.

Quote from Cluster Munition Coordinator Thomas Nash:

“This is a tragedy for the girls and their family and the worst thing is that they're not alone. These indiscriminate weapons continue to kill and maim long after they're used, and that is why we're calling on governments meeting here today to agree on an action plan that will stop this from happening again and really make a difference to people's lives.”

CONTACTS

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The CMC has also produced broadcast-quality video footage three days ago from southern Laos near the Vietnam border, showing clearance operations, cluster bomb survivors, campaigners, a Lao government spokesperson and the meeting venue. You can download the 8-minute cluster bomb video news release from: http://www.green-digital.com/CMC_LOAS.mp4 and we can also send you a shot list.

Additional **Handicap International** footage with mine-risk education activities, interviews with survivors and background on the scrap metal problem is available at: <ftp://ftp.handicap-international.fr/>
login: invite /password: invite / folder: Laos