

Statement
By Honorable Mr. Vongchanh PHOMSAVATH,
Member of the National Assembly of Lao PDR,
Vice-Chairman of Lao Front for National Construction,
At the Parliamentary Event on Interfaith Dialogue
21-24 November 2012, Bali, Indonesia

Honorable Mr. Chair,
Honorable Parliamentarians,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives a great honor and pleasure for Lao delegation in having a chance to come to the beautiful city of Bali to attend the Parliamentary Event on Interfaith Dialogue with the theme: "The parliamentary Role in Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Cooperation".

First of all, on behalf of the Lao National Assembly, I would like to express my sincere thank to the house of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia for the warm welcome and the good hospitality extended to us since our arrival in Indonesia. I also would like to express my appreciation to the organizers for the hard work and thoughtful arrangement the meeting which provides the perfect venue to address issues of concern. I am confident that with the joint efforts of all participants, the meeting will be a good success.

The theme of the interfaith dialogue is of great significance for the parliaments of various countries to strengthen our understanding and benefit the most from cooperation among people of different faiths and cultures. Climate change, hunger, poverty, conflicts and protection of human rights are today challenges of human being regardless of their faith. These challenges require a common attention from all religions and cultures. I believe that through our constructive exchanges and discussion, our mutual understanding will be deepened and our corporation will be enhanced.

Honorable Mr. Chair
Honorable Delegates,
Distinguished Guests,

As you are aware that Laos has an area of 236,800 square kilometers and a population of 6.4 million, it is bordered on the north by China, the south by Cambodia, the east by Vietnam, and the West and North West by Thailand and Burma. Lao PDR is a nation which is composed by 49 ethnic groups with diversity of traditions and dialects. In Lao PDR, there are four main religions, namely, Buddhism, Christians, Baha'i faith and Islamic. The majority of the multi ethnic Lao follow Buddhism. The remainder of the population practice other religion, namely, Christians, Baha'i faith, Islam. Some ethnic groups follow their own traditional customs.

The multi ethnic Lao people enjoy the right to belief or not to belief any kind of religions and their religion freedom has been clearly guaranteed in the constitution of

the Lao PDR. Its article 9 stipulated that the State respects and protects all lawful activities and encourages the Buddhist and followers of other religions to participate in those activities which are beneficial to the country and its people. All acts of fomenting division among religions and among the people are totally prohibited.

Besides, the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR has signed a Decree number 92/PM on Management of Protection of Religious Activities in the Lao PDR since July 2002, with a view to ensuring the freedom of religion for all citizens without any discrimination. The Decree strongly stated that various religions existing in the Lao PDR have been established with the consent of believers without any concern of bribing from any political institutions or individuals from outside or inside the country. The goal of activities of whatever small or big religions in the Lao PDR is based and aimed at serving the development of the country and educating the population of various social strata to follow the progressive teaching of their religion such as: avoiding badness, doing good and having a pure heart, teaching humans in the spirit of solidarity, mutual assistance and love, assisting humans in the spirit of equality, justice and peace. In addition, Lao citizens, aliens, stateless persons and foreign residents in the Lao PDR have the right to carry out or organize religions ceremonies where their monasteries, mosques or churches are located.

Honorable Mr. Chair,
Honorable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Lao PDR, the religions have undertaken different activities and they have contributed the greatest benefit for the development of our nation. Temples, Churches, Mosques were places to educate the public to behave themselves to be kind, hospitable toward each other and to avoid bad behavior. Furthermore, they also contributed to the development of education, public health and other community activities. In general, the majority of religious organizations have acted correctly according to the Lao laws. However, some religious organizations have conducted their activities which breached the laws, for example, there is discrimination among people who believe or non believe in religion; establish churches without obtaining permission from the concerned authorities; allured and attracted people to go the Church by incorrect procedures.

Each ethnic group in Lao PDR has its typical custom, traditional culture which are unique of their own ethnic which can be seen in their like, familiarity, belief, material and spiritual being. In the Lao context, as parliamentarians we have tried to encourage and educate the Lao multi ethnic people from different faith and culture to enhance their conscious observance of the Constitution and laws and live together in peaceful manner without discrimination. These resulted in they have always lived together in harmony, unity, mutual respect and assistance like a big family.

Currently, more than ever, the international community has the responsibility and also the opportunity to promote solidarity, mutual understanding and interreligious as the dimension of culture of peace, and share a common challenge of life regardless of our faith. In this spirit, let me reaffirm that the Lao PDR remains committed to working closely with the international community in fulfilling the common aspiration of the world nations to promote interfaith and intercultural cooperation.

I believe that with great solidarity of the enlightened parliaments of various regions altogether, we will be able to achieve the above-mentioned goals.

In conclusion, may I wish fruitful outcome to the conference.

Thank you.