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Summary of stakeholders' submissions on Lao People's Democratic Republic*

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I. Background

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, taking into consideration the periodicity of the universal periodic review and the outcome of the previous review.[1] It is a summary of 16 stakeholders' submissions[2] for the universal periodic review, presented in a summarized manner owing to word-limit constraints.

II. Information provided by stakeholders

A. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with human rights mechanisms

2. HRW, HRF, JS2, JS3 and JS6 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.[3]

3. CLW recommended the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.[4]

4. JS1 and JS3 recommended that Lao People's Democratic Republic become party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[5] JS3 recommended the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[6] JS1 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.[7]

5. CSW and ECLJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic remove reservations to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[8]

6. HRF recommended the ratification of ILO Domestic Workers Convention 2011 (No. 189).[9]

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7. CSW, CLW, JS2 and JS3 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic issue a standing invitation to all United Nations Special Procedure mandate holders, ensuring they have unhindered access to all areas of the country.[10]

B. National human rights framework

Institutional infrastructure and policy measures

8. JS2 recommended that an independent national human rights institution be established in accordance with the Paris Principles.[11]

9. JS2 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic include civil society organisations in the universal periodic review process before submitting the national report, consult with civil society on the implementation of recommendations, and incorporate the results of the review into action plans with a view to presenting a midterm evaluation report to the Human Rights Council.[12]

C. Promotion and protection of human rights

1. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law

Equality and non-discrimination

10. ICJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic include a provision in the Constitution explicitly prohibiting discrimination on all grounds, extend this protection to all persons regardless of citizenship, and enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law to ensure adequate and effective substantive and procedural protection against all forms of discrimination.[13]

Right to life, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture

11. Although authorities did not carry out any executions since 1989, JS1 and JS3 reported that the law maintained the death penalty for a wide range of offences, including drug trafficking and possession, that did not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes".[14] JS3 underlined the lack of transparency in capital punishment cases, with challenges in accessing up-to-date information on its use.[15]

12. JS1 reported that under Article 35 of the Law on Criminal Procedure, defendants facing capital punishment must be represented by a "protector", defined as a lawyer representative of an organisation, or a close relative who "participates in the proceedings to protect the rights and interests" of the defendant.[16] JS1 stated that this did not translate into effective representation as incommunicado detention reportedly remained a common occurrence, with prisoners unable to contact their families or lawyers.[17]

13. JS1 and JS3 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic publish detailed statistics about persons sentenced to the death penalty, including status of any appeals or request for clemency and current location.[18] JS1 recommended that all people at risk of being sentenced to death receive competent and independent legal assistance and representation.[19] JS1 and JS3 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic institute an official moratorium on executions, and commute existing death sentences to terms of imprisonment, with a view to abolishing the practice entirely.[20]

14. CLW, HRF and JS2 reported a pattern of arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, attacks and killings of critics of the Government or those participating in peaceful activism, including civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and journalists.[21]

15. HRF recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic end all forms of hostility against activists, journalists, and opposition groups to ensure that human rights defenders can operate peacefully and safely.[22] JS2 recommended that the authorities ensure that journalists are able to work freely and without fear of retribution for expressing critical

opinions.[23] JS3 and JS6 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic end the harassment, arbitrary arrest, and detention of political opponents, human rights defenders and other civil society organisations who peacefully criticise the authorities.[24] JS2 recommended that the authorities conduct prompt, effective, impartial, thorough, and independent investigations into all cases of intimidation, attacks, and killings against human rights defenders,[25] and, along with JS3 and JS6 recommended the immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders detained for exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly.[26]

16. JS3 stated that the Laotian authorities continued in their longstanding failure to take steps to ensure impartial and transparent investigations into the fate and whereabouts of victims of enforced disappearances.[27] ADL, CSW, HRF, HRW, JS2, JS3, and JS5 underlined the disappearance of civil society leader Sombath Somphone in 2012, whose fate remained unknown, after his criticisms of the Government for land deals that threatened to make thousands homeless,[28] and considered that the authorities: (a) failed to progress in his investigation; [29] (b) gave misleading information on the steps it had taken to discover his whereabouts; [30] and (c) denied any knowledge about the case.[31]

17. HRF, HRW, CSW, JS2, JS3, JS5 and JS6 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic conduct a full and impartial investigation into the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone and all other victims and disclose their whereabouts.[32] JS3 recommended that Laotian authorities thoroughly provide updates to the families of the victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and criminalise enforced disappearances in line with international standards.[33]

18. JS1 reported that conditions in prisons and other detention facilities could be harsh or life-threatening due to the inadequate supply of food, space, and medical care, and that overcrowding led to the spreading of diseases.[34]

19. JS1 recommended ensuring that detention conditions comply with the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules, specifically regarding access to food and women's needs for privacy and safety.[35] CSW recommended ensuring that all detainees are treated humanely and are provided with adequate facilities and medical care where necessary.[36]

Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law

20. JS1 reported that all judges in the country were members of the ruling party, the latter exerting systemic influence over the justice system.[37] GERG stated that judicial independence was further undermined by the so-called "legal coordination committees", which included local prosecutors, government officials, police, and local officers of the National Assembly.[38] Judges were required to work with the committees to obtain their views before hearing difficult and complicated cases.[39]

21. GERG recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic adopt and enforce necessary measures to further strengthen the structural and behavioural independence of the judiciary.[40]

22. JS1 stated that the concept of a lawyer as an advocate was not widely understood by the public or within the justice system, leading to defendants failing to choose to be represented by professionals.[41] JS1 underlined that women, particularly from ethnic minorities, experienced even more difficulty accessing fair trials due to the lack of qualified attorneys.[42]

23. JS1 recommended providing sufficient resources and funding for the appointment of competent lawyers.[43]

24. In gender-based violence cases, ICJ reported that lawyers encountered difficulties accessing case files and evidence collected by the police and public prosecutors, the latter often claiming the confidentiality of information.[44] ICJ highlighted that the use of alternative dispute resolution, such as seeking help from family or village elders for "re-education" and "mediation" could impede victims of gender-based violence from accessing justice and perpetuate impunity.[45]

25. ICJ recommended that the State ensure that any use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in gender-based violence cases comply with international standards, including that such mechanisms are carried out by independent mediators and conciliators, specifically trained to intervene in cases of gender-based violence.[46]

Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life

26. CLW, JS1 and JS2 reported that while the Constitution and other relevant legal frameworks granted citizens the right to freedom of expression, this right was routinely obstructed by the government, particularly for public criticisms it deemed harmful to its reputation.[47] JS3 and JS6 reported that authorities routinely arrested, detained and intimidated critics of government policies and actions or those exposing instances of corruption.[48]

27. In that context, JS2 and HRF pointed out that Articles 110, 117, 205 and 206 of the Penal Code criminalised "treason to the nation", "propaganda against the state", and defamation, libel and insult.[49] JS1 specified that the law forbid the slandering of the state, distorting party or state policies, inciting disorder, or propagating information or opinions that weaken the state.[50]

28. HRF and JS2 reported that the Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime enabled the regime to silence online criticism through criminalisation.[51] JS2 stated that Decree No. 327 on Internet Information Management contained provisions that unduly restricted freedom of expression, imposing disciplinary, civil, and criminal punishments for online criticism and the circulation of information and photos deemed to be false or untrue.[52]

29. JS2, JS3 and HRF stated that in 2020, the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism issued a notice to social media outlets to register with the regime and that it followed government order 256 to the Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime adopted in 2019, which prohibited the spread of "fake news and disinformation on social media".[53] In 2021, the Ministry of Public Security issued a notice that established a special task force to monitor and combat illegal online content and fake news on social media platforms.[54] In August 2023, authorities reportedly announced additional measures to tighten restrictions on social media channels that contained "misleading or distorted information critical of the government".[55]

30. JS2 reported that the media laws required the submission of materials for government approval before publication and that these strict controls led to high levels of self-censorship among journalists.[56] Furthermore, JS2 stated that Decree No. 377 on Press Activities of Foreign Media Agencies, Diplomatic Missions, and International Organisations required foreign journalists wishing to cover events in the country to seek permission from the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism 15 days before entering the country, and submit their content to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for approval.[57]

31. JS2 and HRF recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure freedom of expression and media freedom by aligning national legislation with international standards.[58] JS2 recommended the adoption of a law on access to information to safeguard the right to freedom of expression in both physical and digital spaces.[59] JS2 further recommended halting the harassment, arrest, and prosecution of individuals for exercising their freedom of expression, and that relevant criminal cases be reviewed, with charges dropped and convictions quashed where appropriate.[60]

32. HRW reported that the Laotian government had engaged in "swap mart" arrangements with neighbouring countries, allowing the exchange of Lao dissidents, in a bid to silence dissent.[61]

33. JS2 and HRW recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic immediately terminate any official agreements or measures that facilitate transnational repression of human rights activists.[62]

34. Although the Constitution guaranteed the right to set up associations,[63] JS1, JS2 and JS5 reported that Decree No. 238 on Associations limited the activities of civil society organisations by giving authorities powers that enable arbitrary restrictions or denials of human rights, including to curtail the activities and finances of associations, and powers to discipline associations and members on arbitrary grounds.[64]

35. ADL and JS5 recommended repealing or significantly amending Decree No. 238 and other relevant laws to ensure their application enable the work of civil society organisations.[65] More specifically, JS1 and JS2 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic eliminate burdensome registration and funding requirements for non-governmental organisations, ensure that they do not face harassment or negative legal consequences for advocating for human rights, and create a safe and enabling environment.[66]

36. CLW and JS2 reported that peaceful assemblies continued to be obstructed for "public disorder" related charges.[67]

37. JS2 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic revise Article 72 of the Penal Code criminalising "gatherings aimed at causing social disorder",[68] and unconditionally and immediately release all protesters detained for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and review the cases of such individuals to prevent further harassment.[69]

38. Although the Constitution guarantees citizens' right to freedom of belief and criminalises the harassment of citizens based on their religion,[70] CSW and ECLJ reported that these were not implemented in practice due to the limitation of state protection to "lawful activities" and the prohibition of "all activities creating division among religions" as per Article 118 of the Penal Code.[71] CSW considered that the terms "creating division" and "lawful activities" lacked clarity in their definition.[72] CSW and ECLJ noted that under Decree No. 315 on Management and Protection of Religious Activities, official approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs was required for the establishment of religious groups and the appointment of officials in their governing committees.[73]

39. ADL and JS3 stated that authorities had continued to harass, arrest and discriminate against religious minorities with complete impunity.[74] CSW and ECLJ stated that Christians in rural areas faced arbitrary detention, forced eviction, confiscation of land and livestock, destruction of property, harassment, and discrimination.[75]

40. ADL, CSW JS2 and JS3 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic better guarantee religious freedom through the elimination of harassment and discrimination, and review the cases of attacks on religious representatives through independent investigations.[76] More specifically, ECLJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic reform its laws and practices that target Christians and prevent them from being able to peacefully practice their religion, focus on educating village authorities on religious liberty issues, and ensure that no one is arrested, attacked or forced from his home because of his faith.[77] CSW recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure that any form of registration system is optional, not compulsory, and is not used as a tool to control religious activities.[78]

41. CLW, JS2 and JS3 reported that Lao People's Revolutionary Party dominated all aspects of politics.[79] JS3 stated that the legal framework continued to allow only one political party to legally exist, preventing the development of a multi-party system and hindering the creation of participatory and inclusive election processes.[80]

42. JS3 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic undertake legal and institutional reforms to ensure genuine, inclusive, and participatory elections that allow for the registration and participation of multiple political parties and independent candidates, and establish an independent body tasked with the management of all electoral processes.[81]

43. JS3 reported that the February 2021 elections marked a further marginalisation of women in the political life of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as they accounted for 22% of the National Assembly, down from 28% in the previous legislature.[82] JS3 associated this to the fact that key political processes were controlled by the ruling party, which had been long dominated by men.[83]

44. JS6 recommended that Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure the inclusion of women in decision-making processes as well as legislative and governmental roles through affirmative action policies.[84]

Right to privacy

45. CLW reported that the infringement of privacy by authorities was routine and systemic for the purposes of monitoring free speech.[85]

Prohibition of all forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons

46. ADL reported that young Laotians, both women and men, were recruited by dubious agencies for job opportunities or apprenticeships in neighbouring countries.[86] JS3 reported that women were particularly lured into working in the Special Economic Zones by deceptive ads promising well-paying jobs and good working conditions, where they became victims of human traffickers and forced labour as "chat girls".[87] ADL stated that, in the case of minors, officials were often bribed to provide them with forged papers which then identified them as adults, and highlighted that most were then subjected to forced labour, forced prostitution, and forced marriage.[88]

47. CLW observed that parts of the country had become destinations for transnational human trafficking.[89] CLW detected an emerging trend of online scam operations located in the country's Special Economic Zones, particularly in the Boten province, involving the trafficking of nationals from neighbouring countries for labour in criminal organisations.[90]

48. CLW recommended the implementation of comprehensive measures to hold agencies accountable for forced labour and human trafficking, and regular proactive trafficking screenings in high-risk areas, including border zones, mining, agricultural and construction projects, and service parlours.[91] CLW further recommended launching counter-trafficking training campaigns across government agencies to improve detection, enforcement, and reporting,[92] and urged for continued collaboration with international civil society organisations to support victim identification, rehabilitation, and services.[93] ADL recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries' authorities to combat drug and human trafficking and ensure support for victims.[94] JS3 highlighted the need for effective protection measures for victims, particularly within the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zones.[95]

Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

49. JS5 reported labour exploitation with excessive working hours and inadequate working conditions in the Special Economic Zones,[96] noting that although companies had committed to providing employment opportunities for the local population within the zone, this had been primarily limited to young women in the unskilled workforce earning minimum wage.[97]

50. JS5 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure that the minimum wage is sufficient to ensure a decent living for workers and their families.[98]

51. CLW reported that workers were prevented from forming and joining worker organisations independent of the government-based Lao Federation of Trade Unions.[99]

52. ADL recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic ensure the independence of trade unions.[100] CLW recommended that authorities allow for third-party monitoring mechanisms independent of governmental organisations to examine, control and monitor labour rights abuses.[101]

Right to social security

53. WWDA recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic prioritise the dissemination of the importance of social security to increase the percentage of insured individuals, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged groups, and ensure that social security and public health agencies oversee health insurance services in hospitals and nursing homes for individuals holding social security cards.[102] WWDA further recommended that the Government ensure that employers create conditions facilitating access to insurance and that such insurance is effectively utilised by employees, monitor the implementation of social security policies within companies, enforce social security policies for employers to address unemployment, and provide financial assistance to support disadvantaged individuals

alongside establishing special provisions for people with disabilities to access social security.[103]

Right to an adequate standard of living

54. ADL reported that the Government had adopted a new law requiring residents to pay fees for their land title certificates, with each village having a different fee and a lack of national regulation setting standards and rules as to the amount of this fee.[104]

55. ADL highlighted that land grabbing by the government without adequate compensation led to poverty in the country, and, in addition, most projects carried out in land-grabbed areas had not created any employment opportunities for locals.[105]

56. ADL recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic prioritise the land rights of the local population and only allow projects benefiting the local population.[106] HRF recommended halting government-facilitated land deals wherein citizens lose their property without proper compensation.[107]

Right to health

57. ICJ reported that Article 201 of the Penal Code criminalised illegal abortions, with ministerial approvals outlining the circumstances in which abortion may be legal, including where a pregnant woman has certain medical conditions placing her health at risk, cases of rape, failed contraceptives, having more than four children, poverty, and young age.[108] Despite the legality of safe abortions, ICJ observed that safe abortion in practice remained inaccessible due to social stigma.[109]

58. ICJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic repeal provisions criminalising abortion and enhance women's access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.[110]

Right to education

59. BC reported that achieving quality education remained a challenge.[111]

60. BC recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic increase investment and public expenditure on education, including raising the quota of nationwide recruitment of teachers, especially in rural areas, as well as providing necessary facilities to support the efforts made by teachers.[112] GERG recommended ensuring the quality of education by addressing financial challenges faced by schools, teachers, parents, guardians, children, and all other stakeholders.[113] More particularly, BC recommended conducting a comprehensive review of the national education quality strategies, placing strong emphasis on the education of teachers, teaching methods, and student engagement,[114] implementing more accessible education programmes through free, unpaid schools with provided facilities,[115] and introducing financial assistance programmes to alleviate the financial burden on vulnerable families to ensure that all children have access to education.[116] BC further recommended advocating campaigns on the importance of education due to the increasing child labour issue and dropout rates over the nation,[117] and strengthening policy development and implementation processes in the education sector, ensuring clear guidelines and standards across all regions.[118]

Development, the environment, and business and human rights

61. JS5 reported that the government had abolished regulations governing resettlement and compensation plans for development projects, without providing an adequate framework to replace them,[119] with the most significant repeal being that of Decree No. 84, which set standards for "compensation".[120] Although the Decree had flaws, such as poor implementation regarding the participation of affected communities in the planning of compensation, resettlement, and livelihood rehabilitation, JS5 reported that civil society and affected persons considered the Decree a crucial tool, providing legal safeguards ensuring public participation and establishing mechanisms to seek compensation and resettlement for those impacted.[121] JS5 stated that the Decree was repealed due to its content being already covered in the amended Land Law, but underlined that the Land Law remained vague and

inadequate in addressing remedies and reparations,[122] particularly failing to address resettlement.[123]

62. JS5 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic rescind the repeal of Decree No. 84 on Compensation and Resettlement Management in Development Projects and address its flaws, incorporating explicit provisions to protect the human rights of affected persons, prevent forced evictions, and ensure adequate compensation and remedies.[124]

63. JS5 highlighted that the general provisions on Special Economic Zones lacked adequate measures to identify or manage human rights risks, particularly regarding forced evictions,[125] observing, along with JS3, that land conflicts persisted due to development projects that had forcibly displaced local communities and smallholder farmers without proper consultation, leaving them without land, access to resources, or livelihoods, and with insufficient remedies.[126] JS5 further pointed out environmental degradation linked to these projects.[127] While the Land Law allowed the State to reacquire land for public purposes, it was often broadly interpreted to include purposes of private gain.[128] Additionally, JS5 found that compensation offered was inadequate, with alternative lands proposed by companies failing to support the livelihoods of resettled households.[129] Following the 2018 dam collapse in Attapeu province, JS5 reported that thousands of people had been displaced into temporary shelters with promises of resettlement and financial support, but concerns remained about delays and unsuitable conditions, as well as the majority of compensation funds being directed to the government rather than the affected communities.[130]

64. JS5 recommended that human rights and environmental impact assessments be conducted before any project that could result in forced displacement, ensuring public participation and compliance with international standards.[131] Additionally, JS5 urged amendments to the Land Law to prevent forced evictions from lands, territories, and natural resources traditionally used by communities, regardless of legal title, and recommended reviewing all Special Economic Zone and hydropower projects to prevent environmental harm and safeguard cultural heritage.[132]

65. JS6 recommended that the State re-evaluate policies on large industries and hydroelectric dams, conducting comprehensive impact assessments that consider the dependency of ethnic minorities on land and natural resources.[133] JS3 recommended to ensure fair and adequate compensation for all affected individuals and communities, suspend all planned hydropower projects until a transparent review is conducted, and explore alternative energy planning and development options.[134]

2. Rights of specific persons or groups

Women

66. JS4 reported challenges preventing women and girls from reporting gender-based violence cases and accessing legal remedy, such as the norm of "violence is a private matter", highlighting that this could lead to violence being condoned and reinforced.[135] Village authorities' lack of understanding of gender-based violence reportedly emphasized these barriers.[136] ICJ noted that there were only three government-run protection shelters for survivors of gender-based violence.[137]

67. JS4 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic take comprehensive action to address gender-based violence, including raising awareness through appropriate platforms, and expanding shelter services to ensure women and girls can access protection and legal mechanisms.[138] JS4 recommended creating manuals and communication tools in ethnic languages, using illustrated materials for illiterate women and girls, and disseminating information through radio, television, and storytelling. JS4 also recommended integrating gender equality and gender-based violence awareness into the national education curriculum, helping students understand these issues and how to report cases.[139] JS4 further recommended enhancing collaboration between the justice sector and the Lao Women's Union to improve the dissemination of training on legal procedures, mediation methods, and support for law enforcement officers and representatives of women and girls at all levels. It also called for the justice office and Lao Women's Union at the district level to provide ongoing counselling and legal training for village authorities to better address gender-based violence cases.

Finally, JS4 urged the Ministry of Justice, courts, and relevant sectors to review and revise laws related to the protection of women and girls, particularly the Decree on the Village Mediation Unit No. 626/Government of Laos/2021, to clarify roles and responsibilities, including ensuring women's access to compensation under relevant laws.

68. ICJ reported that domestic legal provisions did not adequately prohibit gender-based violence, underlining the inadequacy of the definitions of "rape" and "marital rape" in the Penal Code.[140] ICJ explained that the definitions were not explicitly based on the absence of freely given consent, but relied on the use or threat of force or deception, along with the term "against her will" which failed to consider coercive elements that may be present.[141] In addition, ICJ observed that the definition of "sexual intercourse" was narrow in the Penal Code, while noting that "rape" was only defined as occurring exclusively to women, thereby excluding men and gender-diverse persons.[142]

69. ICJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic adopt a legal definition of rape and marital rape that centres on the lack of consent, including an express provision regarding the need to consider coercive circumstances in determining consent, and that the legislation should cover and protect all persons without discrimination and include all types of penetration of a sexual nature.[143]

70. ICJ stated that sexual and gender-based violence victims and survivors had frequently been subjected to secondary victimisation in their interaction with judicial authorities, with multiple interviews about the same accounts without the assistance of psychological experts and without the supportive environment necessary for women to exercise their rights, report crimes, and participate in criminal proceedings.[144] ICJ observed inadequacy in police facilities, where survivors often had to testify in confrontation with the offender, alongside unrelated parties testifying in separate cases on the same day due to a lack of private rooms.[145]

71. ICJ recommended establishing specialised gender units within the police and prosecution systems, and the elimination of practices that subject survivors and victims of gender-based violence to secondary victimisation throughout legal proceedings.[146]

72. Additionally, ICJ reported a lack of female police officers to assist with gender-based violence cases.[147]

73. ICJ recommended increasing the number of women in the justice system as a matter of urgency.[148]

74. ICJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic repeal or amend provisions in the Penal Code that discriminate against women, including those criminalising sex work, adultery, and sexual acts with monks, novices, nuns, or hermits.[149] Additionally, ICJ recommended amending laws related to the dissemination of pornography, limiting them to non-consensual dissemination only, except in cases involving child pornography.[150]

Children

75. GERG reported that despite the criminalisation of corporal punishment, 60% of children aged 1–14 still experienced violent discipline as of 2023.[151]

76. GERG recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic develop and adopt effective measures to ensure the full implementation of the Penal Code and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, with the aim of establishing a society that is substantively free of corporal punishment.[152]

Indigenous Peoples and minorities

77. JS6 reported an escalation in the Lao government's military campaign against the Hmong people, with sustained incursions by the Lao People's Army into jungle areas around Phou Bia in the northern Laos.[153] As a consequence, the Hmong community was reportedly forced to relocate constantly.[154] JS6 stated that there was an increase in extrajudicial killings targeting the Hmong, following a reported pattern of persecution.[155]

78. JS6 reported that the Hmong had also been subjected to land grabs and forced relocation to resettlement camps and military-controlled villages, with those in camps facing dire conditions, with inadequate access to food, healthcare, clothing, electricity, and

communication.[156] JS6 stated that Hmong women were reportedly subjected to slavery-like conditions, torture, and rape by law enforcement officers.[157]

79. JS6 recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic immediately cease the military violence against the Hmong and allow humanitarian aid to reach the region,[158] and further recommended the recognition of the Hmong as an Indigenous people, the development of legal frameworks to protect their rights,[159] and measures to prevent land grabs and forced relocations.[160] JS6 also recommended that the State provide fair compensation to those already relocated and to hold the military accountable for widespread abuses, including rape, sexual enslavement, and human trafficking of Hmong women.[161]

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons

80. ICJ reported that categories of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression were not mentioned in the Constitution, and no other laws offered protection against discrimination based on these grounds.[162] Although Article 224 of the Penal Code provided for criminal liability for "discrimination against women", ICJ reported that the justice system normally considered that discrimination covered only biological sex at birth.[163]

81. ICJ recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic enact an anti-discrimination law recognising sexual orientation and gender identity and expression as protected characteristics and prohibiting discrimination on these grounds.[164]

Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers

82. CLW reported that Laotian labour migrants were vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking at various stages of their migration, with poverty, irregular immigration pathways, and the lack of knowledge and network being the main elements rendering them vulnerable.[165]

83. CLW recommended that the Lao authorities coordinate with other countries' authorities to provide repatriation and free and affordable short-term shelter services.[166]

84. HRW recommended that the Lao People's Democratic Republic end the practice of forcibly returning refugees or asylum seekers in violation of the principle of non-refoulement and hold those who had ordered and carried out such transfers accountable.[167]

Notes

[1] A/HRC/44/6, A/HRC/44/6/Add.1, and A/HRC/45/2.

[2] The stakeholders listed below have contributed information for this summary; the full texts of all original submissions are available at: www.ohchr.org (one asterisk denotes a national human rights institution with A status).

Civil society

Individual submissions:

ADL	Alliance for Democracy in Laos, Hagen (Germany);
BC	The Stitching Broken Chalk, Amsterdam (Netherlands);
CLW	China Labour Watch (United States of America);
CSW	Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Manchester (United Kingdom);
ECLJ	European Centre for Law and Justice (France);
GERG	Global Engagement Research Group at Kansai Gaidai University, Osaka (Japan);
HRF	Human Rights Foundation, New York (United States of America);
HRW	Human Rights Watch, Geneva (Switzerland);
ICJ	International Commission of Jurists, Geneva (Switzerland);
WWDA	Women with Disability Association (Laos).

Joint submissions:

JS1	**Joint submission 1 submitted by:** Advocates for Human Rights, Minnesota (United States of America) and World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Rome (Italy);
JS2	**Joint submission 2 submitted by:** CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Johannesburg (South Africa),

	Amnesty International, London (United Kingdom) and Forum-Asia (South Africa);
JS3	**Joint submission 3 submitted by:** International Federation for Human Rights, Paris (France) and Lao Movement for Human Rights (France);
JS4	**Joint submission 4 submitted by:** Gender Development Association (Laos) and Association for Development of Women and Legal Education (Laos);
JS5	**Joint submission 5 submitted by:** International Commission of Jurists, Geneva (Switzerland), Extra-Territorial Obligation Watch Coalition and Earth Rights International, Washington (United States of America);
JS6	**Joint submission 6 submitted by:** Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, The Hague (Netherlands) and Congress of World Hmong People (Netherlands).

[3] HRW, p. 5, HRF, para. 30 (b), JS2, para. 6.2, JS3, para. 32, JS6, p. 11 (4).
[4] CLW, p. 6.
[5] JS1, para. 44, JS3, para. 51.
[6] JS3, para. 83.
[7] JS1, para. 44.
[8] CSW, p. 6 (1), ECLJ, para. 25.
[9] HRF, para. 30 (b).
[10] CSW, p. 6(14), CLW, p. 6, JS2, para. 6.5, JS3, para. 56.
[11] JS2, para. 3.2.
[12] JS2, para. 6.6.
[13] ICJ, para. 26.
[14] JS1, para. 8–9, JS3, para. 49.
[15] JS3, para. 50.
[16] JS1, para. 20.
[17] JS1, para. 21.
[18] JS1, para, 44, JS3, para. 51.
[19] JS1, para. 44.
[20] JS1, para. 44, JS3, para. 51.
[21] HRF, para. 23 and 25, CLW, para. 10. JS2, para. 3.3.
[22] HRF, para. 30 (a).
[23] JS2, para. 6.3.
[24] JS3, para. 26, JS6, p. 11 (3).
[25] JS2, para. 6.2.
[26] JS2, para. 6.2, JS3, para. 26 and 34, JS6, p. 11 (3).
[27] JS3, para. 27.
[28] ADL, p. 2. CSW, para. 22, HRF, para. 26, HRW, p. 4, JS2, para. 3.7, JS3, para. 28.
[29] JS2, para. 3.7, JS3, para. 28, JS5, para. 32.
[30] HRW, p. 4–5, JS3, para. 28.
[31] ADL, p. 2.
[32] HRF, para. 30 (e), HRW, p. 5, CSW, p. 6 (7), JS2, para. 6.2, JS3, para. 32, JS5, para. 35 and JS6, p. 11 (9).
[33] JS3, para. 32.
[34] JS1, para. 27.
[35] JS1, para. 44.
[36] CSW, p. 6 (13).
[37] JS1, para. 42.
[38] GERG, para. 21.
[39] GERG, para. 21.
[40] GERG, para. 23 (c).
[41] JS1, para. 22.
[42] JS1, para. 26.
[43] JS1, para. 44.
[44] ICJ, para. 21.
[45] ICJ, para. 14.
[46] ICJ, para. 26.
[47] CLW, para. 12, JS1, para. 13, JS2, para. 4.2.
[48] JS3, para. 13, JS6, p. 11.

[49] HRF, para. 18, JS2, para. 4.3.
[50] JS1, para. 13.
[51] HRF, para. 16, JS2, para. 4.7.
[52] JS2, para. 4.6.
[53] JS2, para. 4.4, JS3, para. 17 and HRF, para. 19.
[54] JS2, para. 4.7, JS3, para. 18 .and HRF, para. 19.
[55] HRF, para. 19, JS3, para. 18.
[56] JS2, para. 4.5.
[57] JS2, para. 4.5.
[58] JS2, para. 6.3 and HRF, para. 30 (c).
[59] JS2, para. 6.3.
[60] JS2, para. 6.3. See also JS3, para. 26.
[61] HRW, p. 2.
[62] JS2, para. 6.2 and HRW, p. 3. See also CLW, para. 10 and JS3, para. 12.
[63] JS2, para. 2.2.
[64] JS1, paras. 16–17, JS2, para. 2.3, JS5, para. 33.
[65] ADL, p. 2, JS5, para. 35.
[66] JS1, para. 44, JS2, para. 6.1.
[67] CLW, para. 11, JS2, para. 5.3. See also HRF, para. 20.
[68] JS2, para. 6.4.
[69] JS2, para. 6.4.
[70] ECLJ, para. 5.
[71] CSW, para. 3, ECLJ, para. 7.
[72] CSW, para. 3.
[73] CSW, para. 4, ECLJ, para. 6.
[74] ADL, p. 4, JS3, para. 35.
[75] CSW, para. 19, ECLJ, para. 11.
[76] ADL, p. 4, CSW, p. 6 (2) and (9), JS2, para. 6.1, JS3, para. 48.
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[78] CSW, p. 6 (5).
[79] CLW, para. 9, JS2, para. 2.2 and JS3, para. 4.
[80] JS3, para. 3.
[81] JS3, para. 7.
[82] JS3, para. 5.
[83] JS3, para. 6.
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[93] CLW, p. 7.
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[105] ADL, p. 3.
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