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Statement of Robert Keeley, P.H. D.

Mr. KEELEY. Thank you very much. Can I start by saying it is quite an honor to be called to testify. I am quite grateful for the opportunity. I would like to say as well that my testimony, which is in full, obviously, and I will summarize it--but Ms. Khamvongasa and I have never met before today, but actually what you will hear is that although we have worked on this from a completely different angle, some of our conclusions are remarkably similar, which seems to triangulate some of our findings.

I am here today representing the Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI), a non-profit organization headquartered in New York City. The Humpty Dumpty Institute is well known in the landmine community for its innovative and entrepreneurial approach to landmine and UXO clearance. HDI's holistic strategy towards landmine and UXO clearance combines both the removal of unexploded bombs with the productive use of the land once it is cleared. They have successfully implemented programs in Angola, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and starting in 2006 we have been working on a rather large program in Laos removing deadly unexploded bombs; feeding what has now become 25,000 children daily in 150 villages; renovating schools; growing gardens; digging wells; and providing hope and opportunity for tens of thousands of villagers in one of the most remote, bomb-laded, and poorest parts of the country.

I am privileged to serve as the Country Director for this program and will be happy to speak about the connection between mine clearance and food security in my testimony. One additional, important fact—one of the reasons we are here, ostensibly, is to discuss funding for the removal of UXO in Laos. Clearly, the United States has a special responsibility for this terrible problem and while most of the money that is coming from the U.S. originates in the State Department, HDI has managed to develop a new source of funding for this activity—the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) by combining it with food security and children feeding through the Dole-McGovern Food for Education Program. Over the past several years, HDI has received approximately \$10.6 million from USDA to carry out this program in Laos (just this past week, it approved a \$4 million grant to extend this project for another 15 months). Of this amount, \$3 million has been directly allocated toward removing UXO.

My work in Laos under this program has been very rewarding and has added to my wealth of experience both as a bomb disposal officer in the British Military and as an economist from the academic community. I will testify in each of these directions.

So as you mentioned, I studied life as a bomb disposal officer, so I have a technical perspective; but I am also an economist as well. So I am going to testify in both directions. There is one area, another perspective on this, which you may consider helpful, which is when large, unexploded aircraft bombs--they constitute a point hazard, but cluster munitions contaminate a whole area within their footprint.

I did a lot of work with the people in Laos 2 years ago on this map. What we did was we removed all of the aircraft bombs from the map and we looked at the points that represent Cluster munitions. Basically, there is about half a million hectares covered by cluster munitions on that map which translate into 1,930 square miles. So that is a way of conceptualizing the problem slightly differently from the way we have been talking, because when we clear weapons, we tend to think in how many square meters we clear a day. So it is worth scoping the problem in terms of area.

In the questions that you sent me, you asked me a question about the effects of these weapons on the economy. First of all, as has already been mentioned, most of the economy in Laos is based on agriculture production, and rice in particular. So it is possible to use the opportunity cost of the land that can't be used as a measure of the impact. I will talk about that more later.

Also, where there are infrastructure projects—road clearance, dams, hydroelectric power—the UXO clearance acts as a tax of about 30 or 40 cents per square meter. So any infrastructure project that is planned in Laos has to carry the cost of the UXO clearance as a line item, which obviously makes those projects more expensive.

But in the private sector there is an unseen impact. I am not talking about the village level, but the small to medium enterprise level. These costs can act as a barrier to entry, particularly in projects such as forestry or agribusiness where the cost of investing in a project becomes significantly higher because of the cost of the UXO. Unfortunately, we can't measure this because we don't know how many people have chosen not to invest in projects because of the cost of the UXO clearance.

For example, I was helping a Japanese agribusiness that had been looking at growing medicinal plants. And the startup cost was going to be significantly increased by the cost of the UXO clearance. I think they may have decided not to invest. At the village level, most of the poorest people, as we have heard, they can't afford a choice. So they have to use this land as contaminated.

It should also be emphasized from an economic point of view that some of these families are forced to make the otherwise incomprehensible choice of sending their children out deliberately to look for these bombs. These children are kept out of school. They are given a \$15 homemade metal detector and they go and look for scrap metal. There is a

very strong correlation between the casualty rates, the price of scrap metal, and the price of food. I think it is quite clear that we can see, as people need more food, they take more risks and go and look for this stuff. In fact, that is one of the major causes of the casualties today.

I would like to go now in the rest of my time to talk about answering the last question you gave us, which is about how much would it cost. As a bomb disposal officer and somebody committed to this subject, I would like to be clearing every last weapon there is in Laos, and that would take many years and cost billions of dollars. As an economist, I recognize we have scarce resources and we have to make some harsh choices. If we use the principle of cost-benefit analysis and look at the land that is potentially of the most value and remove the areas which are otherwise unusable--mountainous areas, for example, in Laos--we actually get down to about 78,000 hectares of the original 500,000, or 300 square miles. If we were able to use new techniques--and I will talk more about technology later--but if we were able to use new survey techniques, it is conceivable we could get the area down to 22,000 hectare, which would be 84 square miles. That is about 7-1/2 percent of the actual contamination, but it represents the most important land to be cleared.

When we did the calculations on this 2 years ago, it basically worked out at about 138 million, so it is very close to the number that you have come up with. That is 138 million spent over 16 years would be needed to clear the most impacted land. Now I know that sounds like a lot of money, but it is only 7.5 percent of the total contamination.

I think we should remember, to put this into context, that the clearance of the Exxon Valdez cost \$2 billion. So this is quite a small budget and it is quite justifiable by any criteria.

So, to summarize, there is a sound economic argument for increasing the budget for the UXO clearance, making longer-term commitments. And I completely agree that one of the problems is that the sector out there is constantly living on a hand-to-mouth situation. They can't budget properly. They don't know where next year's money is coming from. So whatever we do, it should be more long term and more measurable so the people can predict what they are going to have available next year. If we did that, we can actually measure the benefits to the economy as an investment. So this isn't a cost; this is a benefit. We can consider this an investment in the Laos economy.

I would like to say in support for the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, they already support a number of programs throughout the world. One of the things I am worried about is if we force them to just reallocate their existing budget from other countries to solve the Laos problem, we are simply robbing Peter to pay Paul. So this really would need to be new money, as opposed to taking money out of their existing pocket and spending it somewhere else.

So I would just like to finish the answer to the question you asked about technology earlier. So I will put my bomb disposal hat back on. And I would like to speak on behalf of all the bomb disposal and land mine clearance organizations that can't be here today.

We have been promised a lot from technology over the last 20 years or so since we have been doing this sort of work. It hasn't really delivered very much. In fact, the problem in Laos is comparatively simple. We don't need detectors from space. We really don't. And I am worried if we started spending money on the research, people would take the money, but we wouldn't actually get results. We can achieve the result in Laos with existing technology. There is room for improved techniques and improved efficiency. But it would be a false horizon, in my humble opinion, to start spending research dollars on this. We know what we need to do. We just need the budget.

I know that the American Army and the Special Forces Training Team have already committed a lot of effort in the past to providing the training. In fact, the core training in Laos was done in 1994, 1995, 1996 by the U.S. Army. So they have already contributed quite a lot. We probably don't need them back for the civilian program. In fact, quite humbly, some of the Laos guys I have worked with, they could probably teach me a few things. I am not sure we need to give them much technical training anymore. It is simply about the budget. And that is what I would like to say. Thank you.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Thank you, Dr. Keeley.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. All three of you have had an opportunity to listen to the testimony from our Deputy Assistant Secretary Marciel from the State Department. Would you say that there is consensus not necessarily where we have to reinvent the wheel or get more organizations involved; we have enough organizations; it is just the resources that they need to really get the thing moving. Would there be agreement in that assessment? In other words, we don't have to go look for some more people to come in and help. We have the organizations, but they just need more resources like funding to increase their operations. Am I correct on this?

Mr. KEELEY. Yes, more or less. It is certainly not about new training. I don't really think it is about new technology, either. There is room for improvement in the planning and in the resource allocation processes in Laos, but the problem is, at the moment, management people spend most of their time running around looking for cash. It takes away their time they have got available to sit down and plan what they are going to do.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. In other words, I don't need to be looking for 50 specialists from the Department of Defense to tell the Laotians how to demine these unexploded ordnance. Do you think we have the expertise now in place? It is just a matter of getting more resources?

Mr. KEELEY. I have been doing this type of work since 1981, sir, and the Lao people can teach me stuff about these bombs because they have been doing this since 1994. So there is a lot of expertise in country, both in the organizations that are there and amongst the Laos people. So it is not a technical question, and I don't think we need much in the way of new technology either. It is really--we have a phrase in England, "Let the dogs eat the rabbit." It is more about getting the money available.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Let the dogs eat the rabbits.

Mr. KEELEY. It is a sporting term from the greyhound track.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. I am just searching. Let's say we come up with an increase in funding. We don't need to depend on the Department of Defense for expertise to go down there and utilize the funds. That is what I am trying to get at.

Ms. KHAMVONGSA. I would just like to add, I don't feel like we got clear answers today about the reduction in the State Department funding amount.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. There are clear answers. It was very clear; the fact that they did reduce the funding.

Ms. KHAMVONGSA. Right.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. So there is no ambiguity about that.

Ms. KHAMVONGSA. As to why that has happened. I think it still remains unclear to us, and baffling.

...who migrated to this country. Tremendous hardships. But we are not going to give up because of this.

I wanted to raise another additional question about, let's say that we do get an increase in funding. I just want to get a sense from you. We currently have the current structure that can implement the program of clearing up the unexploded ordnance. Have we actually taken section by section of the country in terms of saying this is certified cleared? Go do the farming of whatever? Has there been any effort taken by the Laos Government to do this?

Mr. KEELEY. Sir, with the help of the international community, the National Regulatory Authority has quite an impressive database, not only of the contamination, but increasingly they are mapping the records of the clearance work that has been done. Now there is some historical legacy work that was done pre-computer, which they are having trouble now putting into that database. So work that is being done today is being recorded, and the perimeter is 1428 being measured and recorded and included in a database.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. This is something my staff will just have to follow up on to see where we are at right now.

Mr. KEELEY. The Swiss Government has been supporting the management and creation of this.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. I hate to keep saying that 1 percent of the contaminated lands have been cleared. I don't want to keep saying this for the next 10 years. Have we done anything? I am totally not satisfied with the responses that I have been getting from the State Department, but we just have to move on.

I am going to withhold a couple of more questions.

Congressman Honda, please.

Mr. HONDA. Thank you very much. Thank you for the clarification on technologies. The recommendation was 7 for 2011 and 10 for the next 10 years. Is that the optimum pace that we can go at?

Ms. KHAMVONGSA. I think that there is growing capacity, and I think the State Department, because of their doubling of increase in funding from the previous year, I think is evidence that the capacity can be met. I would imagine that, with additional resources--I mean we are talking about 30 percent increase between last year and this year to 7 1451 million. We hope that that will then allow for additional technicians, equipment, and more long-term planning, which think is not possible at the current rate of funding.

Mr. HONDA. So at that rate of funding that you would expect, that you are recommending, we have folks on the ground that are prepared to be able to move everything forward and expend the resources as it comes? Are we ready to go?

Mr. KEELEY. More or less, yes, sir. The risk of spending faster is that you would get inefficiencies, because there wouldn't be a capacity big enough to absorb it. The numbers that are being spoken about, I think it is reasonable. There is a need for a bit of institutional strength. I think there is a need for perhaps some better decisions on resource allocation. At the moment, they spend all their management time worrying about where next month's money is going to come from. And as a result, they never have the chance to draw a breath and step back and work out. If they had some consistency of funding, we would see better mechanisms so that they could make better resource allocation decisions.

Mr. HONDA. With the President's budget they allocated 55 million and then the State Department only utilized \$1.9. Is there anybody from the State Department here? Do you know why the State Department did not utilize the full 5?

VOICE. Actually, we will use the entire \$5 million. The \$1.9 million is what is being requested for fiscal year 2011. So it is going to drop back down in the State Department

request. But the \$5 million that Congress did put into the budget for fiscal year 2010 will be spent in Laos, all \$5 million.

Mr. HONDA. The request will be put in for \$7 million for 2011. Is there a reason why we would feel that the State Department would not spend the \$7 million? And then it will be the reality that we are faced with here.

Mr. HONDA. Well, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I understand working through the government. As we know it, working with the government, there is always the need for partnership with the civilian section and oversight, so that there is transparency and a sense of a higher level of confidence that it is going in the right direction.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. If the gentleman will yield, I definitely think we both agree on that line of thought in terms of how we can do this to follow up with this.

Dr. Keeley.

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Chairman, if I may, this is off the subject, but as land becomes available, it would be of interest to me that the land that becomes available stays in the hands of the landowners, and not speculators or anything else, so that the ability to use the land for families or tribal clans or whatever, that that is where the basic control of the land should be. Not knowing Laos that well, I guess what I am trying to say is that it stays close to the community.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Thank you so much for making the effort to come and testify this afternoon. I promise you the chair is not going to finish here. We will continue to pursue this issue.

I believe my good friend, Secretary Clinton, I am sure she is not aware that all this has been going on in Laos. We have got to come up with the data and the evidence and the information that the good people of Laos need help. With your testimony and your expertise in this area, I do want to thank you very much for your coming here.