

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY VIENTIANE



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Australia launches major new education program

Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon Julie Bishop MP, today launched a new A\$86 million (LAK 631 billion) project to improve the quality and accessibility of basic education in the Lao PDR.

Foreign Minister Bishop, together with Minister of Education and Sports, H.E. Dr Phankham Viphavanh, announced the new program during a joint visit to Hom Neua primary school in Hatsayfong district in Vientiane.

Australia's new *Basic Education Quality and Access in Laos* (BEQUAL) program will help an estimated 450,000 Lao girls and boys achieve literacy, numeracy and other life skills for a better future.

The initial A\$86 million (LAK 631 billion) in funding will cover the first four years of the new ten-year program to support the Lao Government's development goals in basic education.

In launching the new program, Ms Bishop said Australia would work with the Ministry of Education and Sports to achieve a quality primary education for all Lao children, including the most educationally disadvantaged - girls, children from ethnic minority groups and students with disabilities.

She said the program would also strengthen the quality of training in eight Lao Teacher Training Colleges, and provide basic infrastructure, including the construction or rehabilitation of 300 schools.

Less than three quarters of Lao children currently complete a full five years of primary school. In some districts, only a quarter of girls complete Grade Five.

As a member of the Global Partnership for Education, Laos will also benefit from Australia's recent A\$140 million (LAK1027 billion) pledge, part of Australia's A\$1.1 billion (LAK8072 billion) investment in global education this year.

Ms Bishop said creating opportunities for children to obtain a quality basic education was an important part of creating a skilled labour force, necessary for economic prosperity and poverty reduction.

Australia will this year provide another 50 Lao students with Australia Awards for long-term study in Australia, and 70 undergraduate scholarships for study in Laos.

During her visit to Vientiane, Ms Bishop said she was delighted the Lao PDR had agreed to be part of the New Colombo Plan from 2015, which will offer Australian undergraduate students new study and training opportunities in Laos.



Foreign Minister Bishop (centre), together with Minister of Education and Sports, H.E. Dr Phankham Viphavanh, announced the new program during a joint visit to Hom Neua primary school in Vientiane

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