

Brief Remarks – Oxfam Australia closure country office

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
I'm delighted to be able to join you this afternoon to celebrate Oxfam's achievements over many years in support of the Lao PDR's economic development.

My diary entry suggested this event was an "official closing ceremony". Normally, a closure is not an occasion one would want to celebrate, or even mention publicly. But this, of course, is not a closure at all, but actually a new beginning as Oxfam – the truly global entity that it is – consolidates its representation in program countries.

The Australian Government has long valued Oxfam Australia's expertise in addressing development priorities, including among countries of the Mekong Region.

And many private Australian citizens and companies continue to support *Oxfam Australia* because of the results it achieves in poor communities across the globe. I personally am a big fan of the fair trade coffee and chocolate on sale at Oxfam stores across Australia. Perhaps too much of a fan!

And Oxfam is my wife's favourite charity – which, trust me, is a very significant achievement – because of its outstanding work in support of women – in recognition of the vital role women have in lifting communities out of poverty – because of Oxfam's expertise in supporting communities at the grassroots level, and because of its global advocacy on development issues that matter.

The Australian Embassy here in Vientiane is looking forward to continuing our long, successful association with Oxfam.

We are delighted, in particular, to be supporting new programs to strengthen inclusive water governance in Mekong countries, and to promote women's economic leadership and empowerment in South-East Asia, so women are better placed to understand and manage the risks, and pursue the opportunities flowing from the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015.

Oxfam's strengths as a development partner, for donors like Australia and for developing countries like the Lao PDR, highlights the imperative of ensuring quality civil society organisations are encouraged to play a central role in designing and delivering aid.

Because of its sectoral expertise and reach into local communities, Oxfam can achieve results on behalf of governments that we could not manage without them.

Taking just one example – Oxfam’s work, with Australian Government funding, to help prepare villages in northern Laos to manage disasters saved incomes and lives when Typhoon Haima produced major flooding in 2011.

Villagers were able to respond to flood warnings, to move property and people out of harm’s way, and new local infrastructure helped mitigate the impact of floodwaters. After the floods, Oxfam helped affected communities to recover, and to learn from the event to better prepare for future disasters.

The bottom line, I believe, is that partnerships with professional, focused organisations like Oxfam are helping the Lao PDR draw closer to its core Millenium Development Goals, and its ambition to graduate from LDC status by 2020.

I congratulate our friends at Oxfam, and their many partners in districts and communities across the Lao PDR, for their outstanding work here to date. And I look forward to our continuing partnership here, with the government and people of the Lao PDR, to help achieve its development goals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today. I am confident our partnership with Oxfam will continue to flourish.