

## **The Australia-Lao People's Democratic Republic Comprehensive Partnership Joint Declaration**

1. The Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable Anthony Albanese MP, and the Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), His Excellency Sonexay Siphandone, mutually decide to establish a Comprehensive Partnership between Australia and the Lao PDR. In doing so, we affirm the priority both countries place on deepening and expanding the bilateral relationship to fully realise the potential of our cooperation and to enhance the prosperity, peace and stability of our two countries and the region more broadly in accordance with international law, including the UN Charter.
2. Australia and the Lao PDR share a warm and longstanding friendship based on mutual respect and understanding, reflected in more than 70 years of unbroken diplomatic relations. The foundations of our friendship are built on enduring people-to-people connections and a trusted and reliable development cooperation partnership. The construction of the Australian funded Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge in 1994 remains a lasting symbol of Australia's commitment to Lao PDR's prosperity and connectivity. We support each other in times of need, including through natural disasters and, more recently, our COVID-19 pandemic response. We recognise the shared challenges posed by climate change and global economic trends and will work closely together to address these challenges.
3. We acknowledge the strong working relationship we have built through ASEAN, including during Lao PDR's tenure as ASEAN Chair in 2024 and Australia's Country Coordinator for ASEAN Dialogue Relations, 2021-2024. We are committed to working closely in partnership to take forward ASEAN and Australia's shared interests under the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. We highlight our commitment to ASEAN centrality, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and to ASEAN-centred regional architecture, including the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meetings and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. We will deepen dialogue and cooperation through ASEAN on regional issues of importance such as economic resilience, connectivity, human resource development, cyber security, climate change, energy transition, promotion and protection of human rights, education and health security.
4. We will continue to work closely through bilateral and regional initiatives to support the institutions and norms that underpin an open, stable, prosperous, and resilient Indo-Pacific region. We strive for a region where all countries work to prevent conflict to ensure strategic stability, and can exercise their sovereignty and collectively shape the region they want. We underscore the importance of a prosperous and resilient Mekong region and will deepen collaboration through subregional frameworks, including the Mekong River Commission. We will explore opportunities to expand cooperation with regional partners that builds the skills and capabilities required to drive sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth.

5. Attached to this Joint Declaration is a Joint Plan of Action (Appendix A) to guide the implementation of the Comprehensive Partnership, which will come into effect on the signing of this Joint Declaration.

### **People, Education and Human Resource Development**

6. We will hold regular Foreign Ministers' Meetings and annual Senior Officials' Talks. We will pursue increased political-level engagement to enhance opportunities for dialogue on issues of importance and mutual understanding between our respective parliaments and political parties, including through the newly established Lao PDR - Australia Friendship Association. We will foster linkages between current and emerging Lao and Australian political leaders.
7. Our development cooperation policy will align with the Lao PDR's policy and its National Socio-Economic Development Plan and Australia's International Development Policy. Australia and Lao PDR remain committed to fostering a trusted and responsive development partnership to advance Lao PDR's development needs through a range of bilateral, regional and global programs. We will continue to work closely to strengthen our development cooperation to enhance Lao PDR's economic and social resilience with a focus on gender equality, disability equity and rights and ethnic inclusion, working with government, private sector and non-government organisations.
8. We recognise the importance and contribution of education to build stronger communities and to foster greater and more sustainable economic and social prosperity. We reaffirm our focus on supporting successful education and human capacity development outcomes in Lao PDR through educational and vocational training cooperation and academic exchanges under bilateral and subregional programs, such as Australia Awards Scholarships and the Laos-Australia Institute, to enable future generations to address emerging and global challenges.
9. We recognise the importance of protecting and promoting human rights in both countries. We reaffirm the value of exchanging knowledge and expertise to achieve this, including through the Lao PDR-Australia Human Rights Dialogues and the Australia-Lao PDR Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program. We are committed to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls including their full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership, in all areas of cooperation. We recognise the value of a diverse and inclusive approach in achieving sustainable socio-economic development.
10. The Lao PDR and Australia worked closely to ensure strong health outcomes for the Lao people during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue working together to improve health outcomes in Lao PDR and the region in the areas of routine immunisation, access to quality healthcare and nutrition, and reproductive health rights.

## **Economics, Trade and Investment**

11. We reaffirm our shared commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic development, and to address the challenges posed by global events such as COVID-19 and climate change. Through increased economic, trade and investment cooperation, we will reinforce economic resilience and forge closer economic ties. We will enhance cooperation on public financial management, transport and connectivity, investment promotion and the management of critical infrastructure. We will continue to build and support the capacity of Lao PDR's small and medium sized enterprises.
12. The Australian Government's implementation of *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, a report to the Australian Government from Australia's Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, is an important element of Australia's efforts to deepen economic engagement and increase two-way trade and investment with Southeast Asia.
13. We reiterate our commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system, including strengthening and reforming the World Trade Organization. As parties to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN, Australia, New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), we are committed to regional economic integration and prosperity. We will collaborate through technical assistance and capacity building initiatives under the Regional Trade for Development Program to implement commitments under RCEP and AANZFTA, including to ratify and enter the AANZFTA upgrade into force. The digital transformation of our economies, and closing digital divides, will play a key part in the growth, prosperity and resilience of our region.

## **Climate Change, Environment and Energy**

14. We acknowledge the substantial effects of climate change on our region. We will work closely to drive global climate action and net zero emissions. We will strengthen climate mitigation and adaptation through high quality long-term climate finance, capacity-building and technology, and accelerating our energy transitions. As we undergo our respective clean energy transitions, the Lao PDR and Australia will seek opportunities to enhance cooperation in these areas, with regard for our respective Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans.
15. In supporting long-term sustainable development, we will intensify collaboration in key sectors that have a significant impact on our peoples' lives and livelihoods. We will strengthen cooperation through bilateral and regional mechanisms in areas that support sustainable economic growth and environmental resilience, including infrastructure, promoting clean energy transition, nature positive approaches and climate change issues.
16. We will continue cooperation to strengthen rules-based and integrated water resources management underpinned by clear, fair and sustainable management practices. Australia will strengthen the capacity and resilience of the Lao PDR to holistically manage water and respond to challenges posed by climate change.

17. We will maintain our longstanding collaboration between the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Lao Government to support sustainable agriculture, food security and rural livelihoods in the Lao PDR.

### **Defence and Law Enforcement**

18. We will continue to work closely on issues of defence and countering transnational crime to ensure the stability of both our countries and the region.
19. The establishment of a resident Australian Defence Attaché in the Lao PDR in 2021 and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between our defence ministries in 2022 provide a strong foundation to further deepen our defence ties. We will work together to identify further activities that will be beneficial to the defence of both our countries and support a stable and peaceful region.
20. We are committed to strengthening our cooperation to counter transnational crime. We acknowledge the strong links between the Ministry of Public Security and the Australian Federal Police, and will seek to further deepen cooperation under a Memorandum of Understanding between our two relevant Ministries.
21. We will increase efforts to partner on law enforcement, anti-money laundering, immigration and customs operations, including to combat the movement of drugs and illicit commodities. We will strengthen cooperation to counter people smuggling and human trafficking, including through regional mechanisms such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.
22. The cyber security of our economies will play a key part in the growth, prosperity and resilience of our region. We will pursue cooperation on cyber and technology, including through capacity building assistance, to protect our economies.

This Joint Declaration will take effect from the date of its signature by the Participants. Signed at Melbourne, on 6 March 2024 in two original copies in Lao and English languages, all texts being equally valid. In case of divergence of interpretation of this Joint Declaration, the English text will prevail.

On behalf the Commonwealth of  
Australia

On behalf the Lao People's Democratic  
Republic

(Signed)  
The Hon Anthony Albanese  
Prime Minister

(Signed)  
H.E. Sonexay Siphandone  
Prime Minister