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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by International Probono Legal Services Association Limited, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 August 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Findings from IPLSA's Visit: Observed Progress Towards the Right to Development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

An IPLSA delegation visited Lao PDR in July 2026 to identify opportunities to strengthen IPLSA's cross-jurisdictional pro bono legal services schemes. During the visit, the delegation also observed developments in the Lao People's Democratic Republic's legal services system, alongside the ongoing China–Lao Railway project. Drawing on these discussions and observations, this statement highlights the tangible progress the Lao People's Democratic Republic has made towards realising the right to development, with particular attention to legal infrastructure, capacity-building, gender equality, and international cooperation, in line with the United Nations' framework for the right to development.

I. Significant Growth in Legal Infrastructure

During the visit, the delegation was informed that the Lao People's Democratic Republic has 682 practising lawyers nationwide. While this figure remains modest, the trajectory of growth is clear. In 2016, there were approximately 188 lawyers who were members of the Lao Bar Association, and most were not practising law. By 2023, that number had increased to fewer than 400 accredited lawyers. The figure of nearly 682 practising lawyers by 2026 (provided directly by the Lao Ministry of Justice and the Lao Bar Association) represents an almost fourfold increase over the past decade.

This expansion reflects sustained efforts to strengthen the Lao People's Democratic Republic's legal infrastructure. The Lao Bar Association (LBA) has adopted a Vision and Strategy Plan 2025–2035, launched on 17–18 December 2024 in Thakhek, Khammuan Province. The plan sets out three core objectives: (i) infrastructure development, including the acquisition of land and the establishment of a dedicated office building to serve as a central hub for legal professionals; (ii) capacity-building, including targeted training and professional development to empower lawyers; and (iii) gender equality, including encouraging women to pursue legal careers and creating a supportive environment in the legal profession.

In addition, the UNDP Lawyer Project (2022–2025) supported the LBA to launch its first strategic plan, establish a continuous professional development system, and strengthen pro bono engagement and peer networks among lawyers nationwide. These measures contribute directly to the institutional foundations relevant to the right to development, including the strengthening of access-related and capacity-related elements of legal systems.

II. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The right to development requires that development benefits all persons, including women and other groups that have historically been marginalised. In a roundtable meeting with the Lao Ministry of Justice, the delegation heard a stated commitment to nurturing young, and female legal professionals, and the delegation observed that this commitment is now being translated into concrete actions.

The LBA's Vision and Strategy Plan 2025–2035 identifies gender equality as a core objective. The plan aims to promote gender equality across its activities by creating a supportive work environment, including measures to support the leadership of female lawyers and to increase awareness of women's rights and gender-based violence. Within the judiciary, UNDP's project "Advancing Women's Leadership in the Judiciary in Lao PDR" (2025–2026) supports the People's Supreme Court to strengthen women's leadership and institutional gender reforms through leadership development, peer learning, and gender-responsive training.

During the meeting, representatives of the LBA also expressed interest in further collaboration with legal institutions, together with other civil society organisations and relevant stakeholders in Hong Kong, China.

III. Conclusion

The Lao People's Democratic Republic's progress towards the right to development is specific and measurable. From fewer than 200 lawyers in 2016 to nearly 700 practising lawyers in Q3 2026, and from policy-level recognition of gender equality to concrete objectives embedded in the LBA's strategic plan and UNDP-supported judicial reform initiatives, the direction of travel is clear.

The China–Lao Railway is reshaping connectivity and enabling the Lao People's Democratic Republic's transition from geographical isolation towards enhanced land-based linkages. At the same time, the parallel advance in legal infrastructure is strengthening the conditions for rule-of-law protections and improving the institutional capacity of the legal system to respond to development needs. IPLSA's delegation noted that challenges remain; however, the reform direction is steady and warrants sustained international attention and support.
