

**Joint Statement on Upgrading to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership  
on the Occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of Japan-the Lao PDR Diplomatic Relations**

At the invitation of the Government of Japan, H.E. Mr. Sonexay SIPHANDONE, Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madame Vandara SIPHANDONE and delegation made an Official Working Visit to Japan from 21 to 23 January 2025, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Lao PDR. During the bilateral Summit Meeting on 21 January 2025, H.E. Mr. ISHIBA Shigeru, Prime Minister of Japan, and H.E. Mr. Sonexay SIPHANDONE, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR issued this Joint Statement on upgrading the bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, taking into account the progress of cooperation in all areas over the past 70 years as well as the future prospects of the bilateral relations for tangible benefit of the people of the two nations and for peace, stability and development cooperation in the region and the world at large.

The two leaders highly appreciated the bilateral friendship and cooperation built on mutual trust and understanding over the 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955. They emphasized that since the elevation of bilateral relations to Strategic Partnership in 2015, bilateral relations have achieved remarkable development in many areas. The two leaders concurred on further developing bilateral relations that are flourishing in all areas and to bring them to fruition for the benefit of both peoples and the development of regional and international community.

The two leaders appreciated the close high-level exchanges between the two governments over the past decade, including mutual visits by the leaders of both countries, notably Prime Minister ISHIBA's Official Visit to the Lao PDR during the 44<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Vientiane, Lao PDR in October 2024. They also appreciated the steady achievements in various areas of cooperation including politics and security, economic cooperation, trade and investment, regional and international arena, people-to-people and cultural exchanges. They also concurred on continuing on deepening and expanding multi-layered exchanges.

The two leaders concurred on promoting cooperation towards the Lao PDR's graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) and its entry into upper-middle income country status in the future. To this end, Prime Minister ISHIBA expressed his intention to further support the Lao PDR's own efforts towards autonomous and quality economic development through strengthening regional connectivity and resilience, the Lao PDR's fiscal stabilization, and improvement of the business environment.

The two leaders emphasized their shared recognition that the two countries are important partners in strengthening Mekong-Japan cooperation and ASEAN-Japan dialogue relations, as well as in further reinforcing the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership through enhanced practical cooperation and synergy in the four priority areas outlined in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), recognizing that both the AOIP and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept share relevant fundamental principles in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. In this regard, the Lao PDR appreciated Japan's unwavering support for ASEAN Centrality and unity as well as ASEAN's efforts in promoting the mainstreaming of the AOIP.

Based on the above, on the occasion of these milestone anniversaries - the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 10th anniversary of Strategic Partnership - the two leaders concurred on upgrading bilateral relations to a "**Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**" and to elevate cooperation in all areas to new heights, including politics and security, economic cooperation, trade and investment, people-to-people exchanges, and cooperation in regional and international society.

The details of cooperation in such areas are mentioned in the Annex.

Signed in Tokyo on 21 January 2025

ISHIBA Shigeru  
Prime Minister of Japan

SONEXAY SIPHANDONE  
Prime Minister of the Lao People's  
Democratic Republic

Areas for Cooperation under Comprehensive Strategic Partnership  
Between Japan and the Lao PDR  
(Annex of the Joint Statement)

**Political and Security Areas**

1. The two leaders welcomed frequent visits by respective high-level government officials and active exchanges between parliaments as well as political parties, and concurred on further promoting cooperation in the political and security areas, including bilateral relations and cooperation in regional and international fora. To this end, the two leaders concurred on establishing a foreign vice-ministerial level consultation to promote political dialogue. The date, venue and agenda of the first meeting will be discussed through diplomatic channels.

2. The two leaders welcomed the deepening of dialogue in the security field between the two countries, including the Lao PDR-Japan Political-Security Dialogue (Director General level) which has been held three times, and concurred on establishing a Permanent Secretary of Defense (ADSOM-Plus Leader) level consultation in addition to the above-mentioned dialogue, with the first meeting to be held at a mutually convenient time in order to further deepen communication on security challenges that both countries face. The two leaders also appreciated the implementation of the Memorandum on Cooperation and Exchanges on Defense signed in 2019, and confirmed to work towards expanding security cooperation between the two countries. The two leaders concurred on accelerating consideration for the provision of equipment that contribute to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) to the Ministry of National Defense of the Lao PDR, and confirmed to consider posting of Defense Attaché, reflecting further developments in bilateral defense cooperation.

3. The two Prime Ministers welcomed parliamentary exchanges between the two countries and expressed their expectations for further strengthening these exchanges, including those involving parliamentary friendship associations and local assemblies. Furthermore, they noted the possibility of exchanging experiences and best practice information on legislative matters through seminars and workshops, both in-person and online, as well as on topics of mutual interest, noted the importance of mutual support in regional and international parliamentary fora. In addition, they shared the view on the importance of continuing legal technical assistance through methods including governmental cooperation.

## **Economic and Social Cooperation**

4. The two leaders concurred on working closely on the formulation and implementation of the 10<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan of the Lao PDR. Prime Minister ISHIBA expressed his intention to continue supporting the Lao PDR's efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through cooperation in areas such as fiscal stabilization, infrastructure development, agriculture, education, healthcare and medical services, climate change measures, clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and so on.

5. The two leaders recognized the importance of advancing efforts towards the common goal of achieving net-zero emissions under various pathways and realizing decarbonization, economic growth, and energy security simultaneously. The two leaders also expressed their expectations for concrete cooperation between the two countries to progress in a manner that takes into consideration the promotion of green growth, including above decarbonization efforts, as the Lao PDR aims to address development challenges such as reducing disparities through balanced urban and rural development.

6. Taking into account the potential for utilizing clean power generated from the Lao PDR's abundant water resources and its export to the Mekong sub-region, the two leaders confirmed to continue bilateral discussions on the cooperation aimed at promoting stable power supply within the Lao PDR and enabling it to contribute to regional decarbonization as a regional clean energy hub in the future.

7. Prime Minister ISHIBA expressed his intention to continue providing strong support for the Lao PDR's autonomous and quality economic growth through cooperation on strengthening public finance management, public debt management capacity and fiscal reform for fiscal sustainability, which is an urgent challenge for the Lao PDR, as well as through cooperation promoting private investment as a means for fiscal sustainability, creating employment through tourism promotion, and diversifying the Lao PDR's industries by improving productivity and quality in the agricultural sector, as well as supporting the Lao PDR in the regional economic-finance cooperation agenda..

8. The two leaders recognized that with frequent heavy rain and flood damages in the Mekong sub-region, enhancing resilience through disaster prevention measures is an important challenge, and confirmed to explore future cooperation in the field of disaster prevention.

9. The two leaders recognized the current situation where UXO remaining from the bombing on the Lao PDR during the Indochina War continues to threaten residents' lives

and hinders the expansion of agricultural land and infrastructure development and emphasized the importance of UXO clearance. Prime Minister ISHIBA expressed his intention to strengthen cooperation with the Lao PDR while coordinating with projects in other Mekong sub-region countries facing similar challenges.

## **Trade and Investment**

10. The two leaders appreciated that the number of Japanese companies operating in the Lao PDR has been steadily increasing since 2015 and that Japanese companies contribute to expanding employment in the Lao PDR. The two leaders also confirmed to continue jointly promoting the Lao PDR's efforts to improve its investment environment towards building mutually beneficial economic relations through the promotion of investment by Japanese companies.

11. The Lao PDR is located at the center of the Mekong sub-region and serves as a connecting point between land and sea routes in the region. The two leaders confirmed to continue promoting the Lao PDR's strategy of transformation from "land-locked" to "land-linked" to play a more active role in enhancing regional connectivity. Specifically, the two leaders confirmed to advance consideration of support for bridge rehabilitation and overloaded vehicle countermeasures, among others, from the perspective of implementing quality infrastructure development in both hard and soft aspects regarding the East-West Economic Corridor, which has strategic importance in enhancing regional connectivity. Furthermore, the two leaders noted the importance of cooperation for enhancing air connectivity, including the development of the Vientiane International Airport.

12. The two leaders concurred on promoting investment opportunities and people-to-people exchanges through the opportunity of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan. They also expressed their expectations for the future establishment of direct flights, premised on expanded demand through both sides' efforts to increase investment opportunities and people-to-people exchanges. The two leaders also confirmed to cooperate towards the success of the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama, Japan.

13. The two leaders confirmed to work on supporting capacity building for entrepreneurs and managers and promoting multilateral and international economic partnerships. They also concurred on continuing cooperation towards accepting Lao human resources in Japan through Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) system.

14. The two leaders emphasized the importance of the Lao PDR's transition to a market economy based on the rule of law, and highly appreciated the concrete achievements of

Japan's continuous legal technical assistance to the Lao PDR since 1998. The two leaders concurred on the importance of continuing cooperation in this field and agreed to cooperate towards publishing the results of joint research on legal system development in the Lao PDR on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations.

### **People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges, Human Resource Development**

15. The two leaders valued the 70-year history of exchanges between the peoples of both countries as a precious asset of both countries and emphasized the importance of building bonds between the younger generations of both countries for the future. The two leaders also celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dispatch of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) to the Lao PDR, and reaffirmed their important role in social development of the Lao PDR and people-to-people exchanges.

16. The two leaders confirmed to work on further vitalizing intellectual and cultural exchanges, promoting Japanese language education, and enhancing youth exchanges through "Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0" and other initiatives.

17. The two leaders noted the importance of cooperation including the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS), Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship, and JICA Development Studies Program (JICA-DSP) for developing highly skilled human resources who will lead the Lao PDR's economic growth and confirmed the policy to strengthen such cooperation while collaborating with other donors including international organizations.

18. The two leaders confirmed to continue cooperation towards promoting social participation of people with disabilities, advancement of sports and cultural activities, and regional revitalization, based on the Chao Anouvong Stadium, which will be reconstructed through ODA to be equipped with barrier-free facilities.

19. The two leaders confirmed their commitment to working together to promote people-to-people exchanges through strengthening the field of tourism, with the intention of further enhancing the cooperation between relevant ministries of both countries. In addition, the Lao side positively considered to extend the period of stay for Visa Exemption from 15 days to 30 days for Japanese ordinary passport holders.

## **Regional and International Cooperation**

20. The two leaders highly appreciated mutual support and cooperation in regional and international fora as well as bilaterally in addressing each other's issue of concern. The two leaders emphasized the importance of the free and open international order based on the rule of law and principles of upholding the UN Charter to promote cooperation and achieve peace, stability and prosperity.

21. The two leaders looked forward to the effective implementation of the outcomes of the Commemorative Summit for the 50<sup>th</sup> Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, including the Joint Vision Statement and its Implementation Plan, to co-create the future of the region. In this context, Prime Minister ISHIBA commended the Lao PDR's successful ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024.

22. The two leaders concurred on strengthening cooperation in addressing security challenges of common interest and concern, including transnational crime, non-proliferation and disarmament.

23. The two leaders reaffirmed that the maintenance and promotion of peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the maritime sphere is an issue of common interest and concerns for all countries. Noting the recent developments in the region, they reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability, avoid actions that may further complicate the situation and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

24. The two leaders expressed concerns over increased tensions, including launching of ballistic missiles, in the Korean Peninsula, shared the view that maintenance of peace, security, and stability in the Korean Peninsula is of great importance, called for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in accordance with the relevant UNSCRs, and reaffirmed the importance of fully implementing the relevant UNSCRs and the 2005 Six-Party talks Joint Statement. They also underlined the importance of addressing the issues of humanitarian concerns of the international community, including the abductions issue.

25. Prime Minister ISHIBA reaffirmed Japan's support for the ASEAN centrality and unity, particularly the ASEAN's unified approach in the swift and full implementation of the ASEAN Leaders' Five Point Consensus that is the main reference to address the

political crisis in Myanmar to help the people of Myanmar to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful solution, that is Myanmar-owned and -led, thus contributing to peace, security and stability in the region. The two leaders called for the cessation of violence, continued provision of humanitarian assistance and constructive dialogue among relevant parties.

26. On Ukraine, the two leaders emphasized the importance of the need for establishing a just and lasting peace in accordance with international law, including the UN charter.

27. The two leaders welcomed that the agreement for the release of hostages and the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip was reached by the parties concerned, and urged the parties concerned to implement the agreement steadily in good faith to put an end to the unbearable suffering. Prime Minister ISHIBA welcomed the Lao PDR's membership in the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) and expressed willingness to cooperate with the Lao PDR as well as other regional members to support the two-State solution in accordance with international law and the relevant UNSC and UNGA resolutions and contribute to the advancement of peace in the Middle East. Furthermore, the two leaders stressed the importance of realizing stability and prosperity in the Middle East region as a whole.

28. The two leaders reaffirmed the urgent need to achieve the reform of the UN Security Council with expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of its membership to better reflect the current realities of international community. Prime Minister ISHIBA expressed his gratitude to the Lao PDR's constructive engagement and support for Japan's bid for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

29. The two leaders concurred on steadily promoting Mekong-Japan cooperation under the "Mekong-Japan Cooperation Strategy 2024". The two leaders affirmed the importance of sustainable development and management of water resources and relevant resources in the Mekong sub-region and shared their intention to promote the Mekong-Japan cooperation mechanism and enhance close cooperation and coordination with organizations in the Mekong sub-region, including the Mekong River Commission.

30. The two leaders concurred on further strengthening bilateral cooperation towards realizing sustainable use of aquatic living resources based on scientific evidence.

31. Building upon the success of the 2nd Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) Leader's Meeting in the Lao PDR in October 2024, the two leaders concurred on promoting energy transition in Asia by utilizing the AZEC platform. In this context, both countries expressed their intention to actively contribute towards simultaneously



achieving decarbonization, economic growth and energy security in the region by leveraging the outcomes of the 2nd AZEC Leader's Meeting in October 2024.