**Statement by H.E. Barrett Salato**

**Ambassador and Permanent Representative Solomon Islands**

**at Lao People’s Democratic Republic’s Review, 35th Session of the UPR,**

**Geneva 20-31 January 2020**

*Check Against Delivery*

Thank you, Madame President.

Solomon Islands welcomes to the delegation of Lao PDR and thanks the delegation for the presentation of its national report. Solomon Islands congratulates Lao on the many achievements specified therein.

We note Lao PDR’s promotion and protection of human rights on the ground: the National Steering Committee on Human Rights established in 2012, which has been renamed to the National Committee on Human Rights with a mandate to promote human rights through a network of focal points in government, offices of prosecutors, legislature, and in mass organizations.

In constructive spirit, Solomon Islands recommends that Lao PDR:

* Amend Decree 315 to ensure that administrative procedures for religious groups are not arbitrary, vague, and discriminatory, and to eliminate the wide latitude local officials have to discriminate against and persecute religious minorities;
* Repeal Decree on Associations No. 238 immediately; allow unincorporated associations to form freely; allow associations to incorporate upon meeting basic, nonarbitrary, non-discriminatory requirements; eliminate the discretion allowed local authorities to approve the formation of an association and to require dissolution; and allow associations to meet freely without advance approval;
* Allow all religious communities to meet and conduct activities freely, regardless of whether they are incorporated or registered;
* Introduce a mechanism to monitor and regulate local officials, especially in rural areas, to ensure they conform with human rights standards and do not arbitrarily and discriminatorily target Christians and other religious minorities; and hold accountable authorities who contravene Laos’ laws and international human rights standards;
* Introduce a mechanism for individuals to appeal local authority arrests and decisions to a national authority to ensure they conform with human rights standards and do not arbitrarily and discriminatorily target Christians and other religious minorities;
* Hold accountable those who perpetrate acts of violence or discrimination against religious minorities, including at the national level if justice is not carried out at the local level;
* Continue allowing and sponsoring religious freedom and human rights seminars; and reach government officials, police, religious leaders, and members of the public across the country by the next reporting cycle;
* Conduct a public advocacy campaign highlighting religious freedom rights; and educate and encourage local individuals and communities to report acts of violence or discrimination against religious minorities, in accordance with law and without fear of reprisal;
* Ensure that all refugees and asylum seekers, and particularly Hmong and Montagnard Christians leaving persecution in Vietnam, are given the protections guaranteed to them under international law, including the principle of non-refoulement;

Salomon Islands wishes the delegation of Lao PDR a successful UPR.

I thank you.