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BUSINESS FORUM ENCOURAGES EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

A business forum was held at Don Chan Palace in Vientiane Capital today to encourage businesses in Lao PDR to employ people with disability in the workplace. Organised by the Lao Disabled People’s Association (LDPA) in conjunction with Handicap International Belgium (HIB), the forum was attended by over 40 representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, private business and Disabled People's Organisations (DPO's). Employees with disability also attended the event.

The forum was the first of its kind in Lao PDR. It provided businesses currently employing people with disability with the opportunity to share their positive experiences about the abilities of disabled people in the workplace with other businesses, organisations and departments. A number of employees with disability were invited to tell their stories about working life to foster a greater understanding of disability.

Mr Bounvien Louangyot, President of the LDPA, said that the forum was important to showcasing the achievements of employees with disability in the workplace. “There is a misconception in the community that people with disability are unable to work. The right to work is a fundamental human right and a person with disability is just as able to work as any other person”, said Mr Bounvien.

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“What is critical is finding jobseekers work that they have the skills to do. This applies to any person looking for work whether they are disabled or not. If a business or organisation is interested in employing a person with disability, it is a matter of having a discussion about the skills required to do the job and working to find a solution that benefits both the employer and jobseeker.

“The LDPA hopes that this forum will get businesses thinking about disability in the workplace and generate more employment for disabled people. Employment and job security are significant issues for people with disability and gaining employment is a large part of social inclusion.

“When a person with disability has employment, their confidence improves and they feel empowered to make a contribution within the community. They can generate an income for themselves and their families helping to bring people out of poverty. It is therefore essential that the Government of Lao PDR, businesses and DPO’s continue to work together towards greater job promotion and development, and with that legal protection for people with disability in the workplace”, said Mr Bounvien.

The LDPA, with HIB’s support, set up a special project in 2009 with the objective of finding employment for people with disability. Since its inception, the Linking Employers and Employees with Disabilities (LEED) Project has helped 33 disabled people secure employment. Currently, it has 312 people with disability registered as jobseekers. To find out more about the work of the LEED Project, visit their booth at the Made in Laos Fair currently on at ITECC in Vientiane Capital, or contact the LDPA.

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