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HRC 29 – Agenda Item 6- Lao People’s Democratic Republic

NGO: Jubilee Campaign

Speaker: Dr Susan Kerr

Title: Freedom of religion or belief in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Date: June 2015

Thank you Mr President.

Jubilee Campaign together with Christian Solidarity Worldwide thanks the Lao People’s Democratic Republic for its engagement with the UPR process.

These last years have seen some improvement in the protection of freedom of religion or belief in the country, including a reduction in the number of long-term Christian prisoners of conscience. However, religious minorities continue to be subjected to discrimination and harassment including arrest, detention, eviction, fines and forcible renunciation of faith.

We urge the Lao government to release all prisoners detained on religious grounds and, in cases of wrongful detention, ensure full investigations. We remain concerned about five Laotian Christians convicted of “performance of the medical profession without a licence” after they prayed for a Christian convert who later died. The Christians were initially accused of murder. We urge the authorities to review this case and to release the five Christians.

We also ask the Lao government to amend its legislation to correspond with the international agreements to which the Lao People’s Democratic Republic is party. The constitutional references to division and discrimination make certain religious activities such as conversion and proselytising liable to sanction. Currently, the State is reviewing Decree 92 regarding Governance and Protection of Religious Activity. This decree is discriminatory and open to abuse as it uses vague terms prohibiting religious believers from “dividing ethnic groups or religions in order to cause social disorder”. In addition, it requires State approval for a number of religious activities including the appointment of clergy or staff, preaching, printing of religious literature, construction of religious buildings. We urge the government to amend such legislation to ensure full adherence to freedom of religion or belief as stipulated in Article 18 of the ICCPR.

Finally, in order to guarantee the participatory nature of human rights processes, Jubilee Campaign and Christian Solidarity Worldwide encourage the State to seek input and feedback from religious leaders and representatives from both registered and non-registered organisations.

Thank you, Mr President.