

**Laos 1959-1961 -
correspondence, official
documents, press clippings,
chrono...**

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Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

Laos - 1959

25 Nov

- Sen, B. R. (Dir.-Gen., FAO - U.N., Italy)
- Veronese, V. (Dir.-Gen., UNESCO, France)
- Candau, M. G. (Dir.-Gen., WHO, Switzerland)
- 3 letters (same text) from D.H.

29 Nov. 59

DRAFT

Dear Sen/Candau/Veronese,

As you know, the situation in Laos had recently become a major international problem in which the United Nations is deeply involved. I have just returned from a visit to the country during which I had the possibility to form a considered opinion on what has to be done in order to avoid most serious developments. Studying the situation I profited also from comments from the various technical experts of the United Nations family regarding their specific fields of activity.

In spite of its long history as a French protectorate and its subsequent five years of independence with considerable economic assistance, especially from the United States, the country is, as you will know, practically on the zero line as regards economic and social development. Apart from being landlocked, with very insufficient and expensive means of communications with the outer world, it is a country which has only the most rudimentary internal system of communications, and which therefore, even in a physical sense is far from integrated as a nation. If you add to that a practically complete lack, at present, of domestic supplies of necessary materials and the absence of simple basic industries, combined with only insignificant exports, you find a country which is forced by circumstances into a dependence on others which has unavoidable political overtones, the dangers of which are obvious when the recipient country is placed on the live frontier of the cold war. I need not elaborate more on a situation in which continued and probably increasingly serious international difficulties will prove unavoidable unless the U.N. family is able to meet the challenge which the situation presents.

If Laos is to save itself, economic integration and economic and social development are in these circumstances essential. However, such a development cannot be achieved without a major effort from the outside world which, in the present circumstances, will have to be undertaken primarily under U.N. auspices. Nothing of this is new but, in the total analysis of the present political situation, it was brought home to me forcefully during my recent visit.

You will have noted that I brought Mr. Tuomioja, Executive Secretary of E.C.E., to Vientiane, entrusting him with an urgent study of the economic situation, in particular the contribution of the U.N. family to the economic growth and stability of the country. The terms of reference for this study were set down in Press release 30/871 of 15 November 1959, which I assume you will have seen. While we were both in Vientiane we were, at my request, joined by Mr. U Nyan, Executive Secretary of ECAFE, who will assist Mr. Tuomioja in his study. The report by Tuomioja will be presented to me within four weeks.

Without wishing to anticipate, I expect that Tuomioja's report will set out clearly and without reservations the facts of the situation. We are already familiar with them but they need to be brought together. On that basis I anticipate that he might recommend urgent special studies by the U.N. family of various questions of key significance. Projects, which even at a superficial glance emerge as crucial, are, for example, a survey of national resources, the planning of at least ~~the~~ the transport and communication system within the country necessary for some economic, social and ethnical integration, and plans for a systematic settlement of the large nomadic - and rebellious - population, tending at the same time to stop the destructive methods used by this population for grazing and related purposes during their migrations.

Once the Tuomoija report is received with its anticipated recommendations for top priority projects, we would have to agree on how to go about them. A detailed planning has to be worked out for the particular studies to be made so as to enable us without undue delay to set in motion measures for implementation of the plans we would try to establish.

I believe that the success of this important initiative will, in the first stages, depend very much of the efficiency of the cooperation established within the U.N. family. The best method would probably be for the selected experts from the U.N. and the Agencies concerned to be organized in teams for the particular projects. The work of the various teams would have to be kept together by a "coordinator" who would also have to be granted a position which gives him full authority also for such political contacts as may be necessary with the Government; he thus would have to be of a different character than a resident representative and with a position somewhat of the type recently tried for Pelt in Guinea. His status, were he not to be an Under-Secretary of the U.N., could probably best be arranged by an ad hoc assignment as Special Consultant on the question of Laos to the Secretary-General, with rank equal to that of an Under-Secretary. You are, I am sure, fully aware of the political significance of these last-mentioned arrangements.

I have wished to bring these thoughts to your attention already at this early stage. There is no need to take a firm stand on the matter until later, when I hope that you will find it possible to give the necessary instructions to your experts, present as well as prospective, working in that area, so that a satisfactory system of coordinated action can be established.

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As soon as the lines emerging from the Tuomoija studies are known, it would be my intention to send to Vientiane Mr. Heurtematte or, if he would not then be available, Mr. Narasimhan, to study on the spot the administrative possibilities for the carrying through of this new type of emergency operation, a question which cannot be covered by Tuomoija during the first stage of our work. Mr. Heurtematte - or Mr. Narasimhan - would then proceed to Rome, Geneva and Paris, in possession of full knowledge about the administrative possibilities and the result of the Tuomoija studies up to that time. This will put him in a position to have definitive discussions with you and the other Heads of Specialised Agencies concerned.

I would hope to have the ground fully prepared for agreements on projects ripe for planning late in January. The blueprints resulting from the work of the teams, established for various projects, would later on be put into effect in the field as quickly as circumstances permit.

I understand that this letter may give rise to some questions from your side, and I am the first one to recognise the difficulty and extraordinary nature of the action initiated, as well as - alas! - the uncertainty of its final outcome. However, I trust that the U.N. family will be able to meet a challenge which, quite realistically, must be described as a question of war and peace.

I shall send you as soon as received a copy of the Tuomoija report, and in due course you may expect Mr. Heurtematte or Mr. Narasimhan to visit your Headquarters for the discussions to which I have referred above.

D.H.