

Laos is one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. It is at least 20 years behind all the other countries of that region.

From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of ordnance on Laos during 580,000 bombing missions—equal to a planeload of bombs every 8 minutes, 24-hours a day, for 9 years – making Laos the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. The bombings were part of the U.S. Secret War in Laos to support the Royal Lao Government against the Pathet Lao (Communist) and to interfere with traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The bombings destroyed many villages and displaced hundreds of thousands of Lao civilians during the nine-year period.

Up to a third of the bombs dropped did not explode, leaving Laos contaminated with vast quantities of unexploded ordnance (UXO). Over 20,000 people have been killed or injured by UXO in Laos since the bombing ceased.



Here are some other startling facts about the U.S. bombing of Laos and its tragic aftermath:

Over 270 million cluster bombs were dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War (210 million more bombs than were dropped on Iraq in 1991, 1998 and 2006 combined); up to 80 million did not detonate.

Nearly 40 years on, **less than 1%** of these munitions have been destroyed. More than half of all confirmed cluster munitions casualties in the world have occurred in Laos.

Each year there continue to be over 100 new casualties in Laos. Close to 60% of the accidents result in death, and 40% of the victims are children.

Between 1996 and 2012, the U.S. contributed on average \$2.6M per year for UXO clearance in Laos; the U.S. spent \$17M per day for nine years bombing Laos.

The U.S. spent as much in **three days bombing** Laos (\$51M,) than it spent for clean up over 16 years (\$51M).

The communist forces overthrew the monarch in 1975 which was the start of years of isolation for this tiny country, which is 25% the size of Ontario. The infrastructure of the country was destroyed from all the bombing. It will take hundreds of years to clean up since there is still 9 million unexploded ordnance still in its soils and they have not been able to recover. This fact along with an 80% mountainous terrain and being a landlocked nation has resulted in extreme poverty, poor medical care, if any and an 8.1 infant mortality.

73% of the population live in remote villages, some without access to any water at all. Those who have access have only very polluted water. **ADOPT A VILLAGE IN LAOS** is a registered charitable organization whose mandates are to assist in the provision of the basic necessities for life in the rural villages. Their primary focus is to fund and provide assistance with water where none exists (or is inadequate for the needs of the village), water filtration, toilets, hygiene training and schools. Their secondary focus is to support students who wish to learn and cannot afford to go, teachers during their apprenticeship year and solar technology where electricity is not yet available.

Steve Rutledge from Port Hope, founder of Adopt a Village in Laos, is a volunteer on the ground in Laos for six months of each year, (paying his own airfare, accommodation and meals) has accomplished the following over the past few years:

He has built seven schools.

He has brought water to three villages that had no water. He has put water into a hospital and fixed up the hospital.

He has installed many banks of toilets in many villages; where there were no facilities at all (this had increased contamination of the water, naturally).

He has installed over 1175 water filter systems (serving approximately 6500 villagers or more).

He has sent 19 primary school children to school.

He has sponsored four University students and continues to do so.

He has provided 52 bicycles for kids

He has furnished a huge education centre where teachers are trained to teach.

He has installed solar panels to give villagers 3 hrs of light each night in their rural homes.

He has built fences around compounds to keep oxen out.

Over this upcoming year, he will be building a three room school and putting on two school additions.

He will install another 800 water filters at least.

For all projects, he must get approval from local governments so that they are not rejected upon completion.

He cultivates good relations with the chief of each village and all the elders. Much socializing is done to make all efforts welcome and accepted.

## **RELIGION IN LAOS:**

Buddhist: 61.05 %

Animist: 31.5 %

*Animism encompasses the belief that there is no separation between the spiritual and physical (or material) world, and souls or spirits exist, not only in humans, but also in all other animals, plants, rocks, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment, including thunder, wind, and shadows.*

Non-religious/other: 4.3 %

Christian: 1.85 %

Muslim: 1.1 %

Chinese religions: 0.5%

The communist government has tried to suppress all religion, as religion competes for the minds of people. They are now supportive of Buddhism.

## **TRIBES:**

There are so many different "tribes" and they have different styles of living and different ways of life. The cultures are all so very different. Some are hunter-gatherers, some have their houses right on the ground, some have their houses on stilts. Some of the primary tribes are Lao, Khmu and Hmong.

## **GEOGRAPHY:**

Laos is a landlocked country, bounded by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Thailand. 50% of the country is mountainous. Most life centres around the Mekong River and its tributaries. The river irrigates rice paddies and provides some fish. The usual diet is fish and sticky rice.