

## Laos eyes membership in maritime body



Despite being a landlocked country, Laos is considering joining the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to facilitate exports to global markets.

Government officials from the relevant sectors met in Vientiane on Thursday to study the legal requirements for joining the IMO as well as the possible benefits if Laos is accepted.

Speaking at the opening of meeting, Minister of Public Works and Transport Mr Sommad Pholsena said that although Laos is a landlocked country, the government's policy is to turn it into a land link.

"It's important for our country to join this organization to ensure more Lao products are exported using maritime transport," said the Minister

Laos needs to open its doors to the world by exporting goods via all forms of transport-sea, rail, road and air.

In 1998, Laos ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the sea (UNCLOS) together with 162 out of 192 nations. The convention outlines the rights of nations to access seas to carry goods to other countries, including the right of landlocked countries to use international waters.

Laos is a member of Asean and the International Navigation Association (PIANC), and has entered into an agreement with Vietnam to use its seaports.

Laos also signed a memorandum of understanding between Asean and China and



other maritime transport agreements on sea access.

If Laos joins the IMO, it will have more rights in using maritime transport while overcoming various barriers for goods entering the world markets, according to a Lao legal expert.

The IMO is a specialized agency of the UN and is responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and the prevention of marine pollution from shipping.

It is also involved in legal matters, including liability and compensation issues as well as the facilitation of international maritime traffic.

The most important IMO conventions contain provisions for governments to inspect foreign ships that visit their ports to ensure they meet IMO standards. If they fail inspections they can be detained until repairs are carried out.

During the meeting, Mr Sommad revealed that every year the government spends millions of dollars to improve land transport access to the seaport of Thailand

and Vietnam through road nos. 8, 9, 12 and 18. “Over the last few years, Lao maritime transport has been developed through management, monitoring and the development of captains,” he said.

International Law Project Manager Mr Phoukhong Sisoulath said yesterday’s workshop aimed to enhance the knowledge of government officials about the IMO and other related conventions to help Laos be better prepared. Official also learned about UNCLOS and the rights of Land-locked countries, as well as Asia-Pacific maritime safety, from two Vietnamese legal experts.

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*(News reported by Somsack Pongkhao, Vientiane Times, retyped by ILP Database Assistant Alounmixay Keoboulapha).*

