

Royal Norway Consulate opens in Laos

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The Royal Norway Consulate officially opened in Vientiane on Tuesday, aiming to boost diplomatic relations and enable closer bilateral cooperation between Laos and Norway.

The opening ceremony was attended by government officials, colleagues and members of the diplomatic and consular corps, along with representatives of international organisations.

Ambassador of Norway to Vietnam and Laos, Mr Stale Torstein Risa, said it was a great pleasure for him to have the opportunity to speak on this occasion and celebrate the official opening of the Royal Norway Consulate in Vientiane.

"Let me add that having Henrik Sahmith as honorary consul, supported by excellent staff, will assure the consulate's business will be well handled, and in a dedicated and professional way," Mr Risa said.

"With the establishment of the consulate, Norway and Laos enter a new phase of diplomatic relations, reflective, I believe, of a trend where our two countries seek closer cooperation in several areas."

Mr Risa said hydropower development, humanitarian disarmament in the field of cluster munitions, gender



Ambassador Stale Torstein Risa speaks at the opening ceremony of the consulate.

equality, healthcare services, education and life skills enhancement for the young, support in combating the illegal drug trade, and assistance to the vulnerable and disadvantaged in ethnic communities were areas of focus for the consulate.

"These are all areas where Norwegian companies, NGOs and citizens are engaged in Laos," he said.

Mr Risa said late last year he visited Saravan and Xekong provinces in the south to observe the Norwegian People's Aid project to clear unexploded ordnance. Since then a third project has been started in Attapeu province.

Last month, Mr Risa saw youngsters from Savannakhet province demonstrate how life skills can be communicated and acquired through participation in school sport programmes,

organised by the Norwegian Football Association and run in Laos by Norwegian Church Aid.

Tomorrow, he will visit a hydropower plant at Theun Hinboun, where the Norwegian enterprise Statkraft has a 20 percent equity stake.

"So, as can be seen, there is a wide array of activity and bilateral cooperation both in the business field and in people to people contact," Mr Risa said.

In November this year, the world will focus on Vientiane and Laos when the country hosts the first Meeting of States Party to the Cluster Munitions Convention, which enters into force on August 1.

"This will be a big event, and the most vivid example of our new phase of bilateral ties.

While Norway initiated the Oslo Process that pointed the way towards a convention, Laos has led the way as a "torch bearer" for the convention in Asia," Mr Risa said.

"Together we have formed a strong humanitarian disarmament partnership, and look forward to what will surely be a most successful meeting later this year."

On November 12, there would be an opportunity to celebrate the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Laos and Norway, he added.