

VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



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AID TO LAOS

Laos is one of the world's few remaining communist states, and one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries.

Most of the 6.7 million people live in small villages or hamlets, with around 80% working in agriculture, growing rice, which is the staple diet. Life expectancy is now 65 years for men and 68 years for women. The majority of the population are Buddhists although the country boasts 68 different ethnic groups.

Laos is land-locked; infrastructure, industry and commerce are poorly developed due to under-investment. However, the state has made no secret of its huge hydropower ambitions and its desire to become the "battery" of South-east Asia. A rail link to Vietnam's port of Vung Ang (a few miles from the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh), and super-highways from Vientiane to Hanoi and to the Chinese border are being planned. The government anticipates that by 2025 hydropower will become the country's biggest source of revenue. But neighbours Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia have raised concerns about the environmental impact of its dam building projects along the Mekong River.

Laos was a French colony until 1953. The power struggle which then ensued between royalists and the com-



munist group Pathet Lao saw the country caught up in the Vietnam War. Between 1964 and 1973, the U.S. dropped two million tons of bombs on Laos, more than was dropped on the whole of Europe during of World War II, making Laos the most heavily bombed country in history, relative to the size of its population. *The New York Times* noted this was "nearly a ton for every person in Laos". Some 80 million bombs failed to explode and remain scattered throughout the country, rendering vast swathes of land impossible to cultivate, and killing or

maiming 50 Laotians every year.

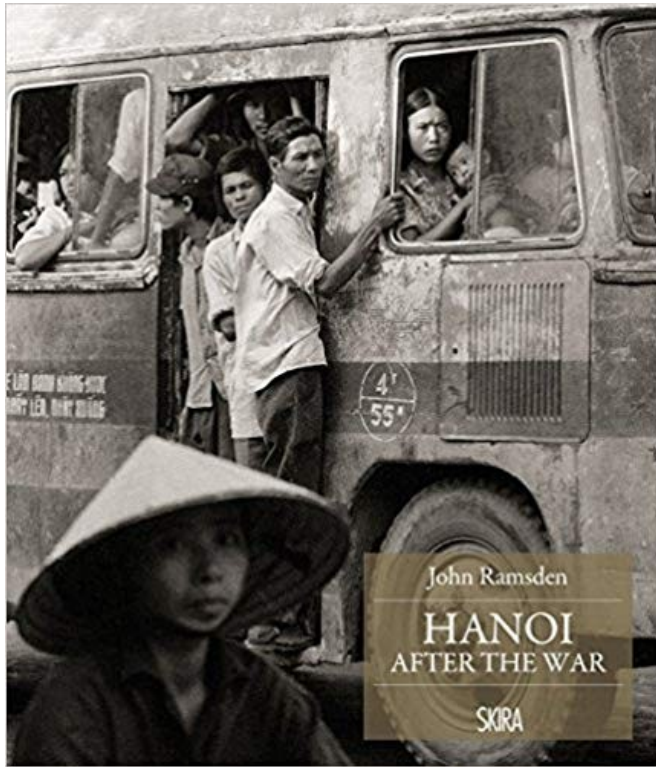
Communist forces overthrew the monarchy in 1975, heralding years of isolation. But after the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Laos began opening up to the world. Despite economic reforms, the country remains poor and heavily dependent on foreign aid.

Over the past 40 years MSAVLC has attempted to provide some relief to the poor and sick people of Laos, in spite of occasional interference by the restrictive government. For many years the charity supported a small audiology and hearing project in Pakse, in Champassak Province in southern Laos. Unfortunately difficulties both in organisation and the supply of materials meant that sadly the project became unsustainable, and it was discontinued in 2010.

More recently MSAVLC has supported a number of small water projects in northern Laos, around the tourist centre of Luang Prabang. Whilst Luang Prabang is a relatively wealthy town, the surrounding countryside is poor, and many of the villages have inadequate water systems. Working with Australian project manager, Andrew Brown and his organisation 'Support Lao Children', we have funded a number of water systems in these villages.

MSAVLC Trustees are hoping that it will be possible to fund similar projects in this region when they visit Laos early next year.

HANOI AFTER THE WAR



‘Hanoi after the War’ is a book of photographs taken by Sir John Ramsden when he was a senior diplomat at the British Embassy in Hanoi, between 1980 and 1983. It is a portrait of hardship, poverty and endurance, but also of an ancient culture, of brave and resilient people, of beauty amidst the austerity. The book guides us through pictures and poignant accounts of an unforgettable time and place.

It was a time when conflicting ideologies came face to face. At the height of the Cold War, John Ramsden, who had earlier worked in Senegal and at the East-West disarmament talks in Vienna, was posted to Hanoi. It was 1980 and at the time he knew almost nothing about Vietnam. The country had rarely been out of the headlines for three decades, but in the West it had always been looked at through the ‘prism of war and ideology’. The realities of daily life, especially in the North, were a mystery to him.

In an interview with Derek Milroy, John Ramsden said,

“It is hard to recall how cut-off countries were from each other during

the Cold War. The clash of ideologies gave rise to all sorts of stereotypes. It was before the internet, before mobile phones or satellite broadcasting: there was very little contact between peoples on either side of the divide.”

“Hanoi felt particularly cut off from the West at that time. Vietnam had been at war, on and off, since the 1940’s. Very few westerners had been to Hanoi in the previous decades. I had no idea what to expect when I arrived in 1980.”

During his postings, which were mostly in Europe but also further afield, the career diplomat was always keen to capture his experiences, but he admits the pictures he took in Vietnam were a world away from the other places he encountered.

“I had the time to explore extensively,” recalls Sir John. “Life in Hanoi at that time was very quiet. I used to go for long walks every morning before work, or in the evenings. I always had my camera with me, which helped me to look really carefully at the life around me. Like anything else, good photography needs sustained concentration and effort. For once in my career, I was really able to work at my photography. And I had a wonderful subject to inspire me.”

“I had never seen a photo of Hanoi before I arrived. There were no tourists and no guide-books. I had little idea about Vietnam’s early history, its culture,

traditions and way of life. I was amazed to discover a city with a thousand years of history; a rich architectural heritage; temples and religious festivals. It was very exciting to have the chance to explore in depth a place that was so little known and yet so talked about in the West.”

He was struck by how quiet the capital was: the lack of cars and even motorbikes.

“A bicycle in those days was a prized possession. There were no neon lights and in the evening people sat on their front doorsteps, drinking tea around tiny paraffin lamps. All you could hear was the murmur of voices and the occasional bike going by. Clearly, it was a difficult time. Economic recovery had barely begun. Daily life for the Hanoians was a constant struggle.”

‘Hanoi after the War’ by John Ramsden captures the capital in black and white photographs and essays by Vietnamese writers who lived through the period. It will be published by Skira in September.



DAUGHTERS OF CAMBODIA

2018 JEWELLERY LAUNCH

Daughters of Cambodia operates in the heart of Phnom Penh's red light areas. They help young women and men escape the horrors of sex trafficking and start sustainable new lives for themselves, by providing dignified, rewarding employment, paired with vital health and support services, including medical clinics, educational opportunities, creative programmes and psychological counselling.

When victims come to Daughters, most have no skills, no education and no concept of any type of job outside of sex work. Due to trauma levels, it usually takes many months before they have adequate workplace skills; but with gentle help and encouragement they are taught to change their life-styles, and are found



work, in one of Daughter's workshops, the visitors' centre, shop or café.

This year they have been busy designing and producing a beautiful new jewellery range which they are making available to overseas buyers. They are also working on a t-shirt catalogue, so that you can buy their lovely t-shirt designs overseas too. If you would like to receive a copy of either of their catalogues please email them at:

marketing@daughtersofcambodia.org

MSAVLC have been supporting a Health and Wholeness project at Daughters of Cambodia since 2015. We are delighted with the progress they are making, and of the wonderful work that they do.

*Mary Lidgard
Honorary Secretary*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting for 2017 was held on Tuesday 10th July at the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in London, by kind permission of the Ambassador, His Excellency Tran Ngoc An.

Chairman Peter Lidgard began by welcoming everyone to the meeting and thanking Ambassador An for inviting us to meet at the Embassy.

In his reply His Excellency said that he was aware of the long association between the Embassy and MSAVLC and he thanked the Trustees and supporters for all the assistance given to his country over the past 52 years. He was very pleased to tell the meeting that Vietnam was growing economically, and that bi-lateral trade and investment between the UK and Vietnam was increasing. However, he stressed that Vietnam is still a developing country and it still has

many challenges. Help for the poorest and most needy people from organisations such as ours, is invaluable.

Following the Ambassador's address the business meeting began with Honorary Secretary Mary Lidgard presenting the Trustees' Report for 2017. She said that the Monitoring and Evaluation visit which had been planned for February 2017 had been cancelled due to her being taken ill, two days before the planned departure. The cancellation meant that all meetings, travel and accommodation plans had to be cancelled, but thankfully almost all of the expenses had been recouped.

In view of the cancellation of the visit, all project managers had been contacted, and the work of the charity had continued as before. She reported that during the year the following

projects had been funded:

200 wheelchairs for the victims of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

The First Aid project and new equipment for New Hope Children's Home.

Training for two Audiology students at All Ears Cambodia.

Midwife Training in Chiem Hoa District, Tuyen Quang Province.

The Joan McMichael Prize at the British Friendship Hospital, Ky Anh, Vietnam.

The Health and Wholeness Project for Daughters of Cambodia.

Mary also said that MSAVLC had been honoured to be awarded the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange's Certificate of Golden Hearts.

Honorary Treasurer John Firth reported another good year financially for the charity.

He said that compared with 2016, income was down to £59,000 but that spending had increased to £78,000 for the year. Nevertheless the charity was on a firm financial footing. Non-project expenditure was only £1,776, most of which was spent on the production of the Bulletin; a total of £241 being spent on travel and administration during the year. John thanked Nic Hewlett for once again formally auditing the financial records of the charity.

Peter Lidgard was again elected Chairman of the Trustees, and Mary Lidgard was elected as Honorary Secretary. John Firth was re-elected as Honorary Treasurer. Susmita Ghosh and Lynn Firth were elected as Trustees, with responsibility for Facebook and distribution of the Bulletin, respectively.

Whilst our Vice-President George Howarth MP was unable to attend, the Trustees were delighted to agree the appointment of Lord Balfe of Dulwich as a second Vice-President. In accepting his appointment Lord Balfe told the meeting that he was looking forward



to his first visit to Vietnam, with a Parliamentary Group in September.

Finally, the chairman thanked all the charity's donors, and everyone who had worked for the charity during the year. In particular he thanked the Honorary Secretary, the website manager, Deborah Dainton, and the Honorary Treasurer, for all their hard work.

Trustees and supporters at the Annual General Meeting held at the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in London.

Left to right: Susmita Ghosh, Peter Lidgard, John Firth, Shirley Hepple, Gerald Hardy, Pat Larkin, Lord Balfe of Dulwich, Mary Lidgard, Warwick Morris and Lynn Firth.

JUNIOR FUNDRAISERS



WELL DONE TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN AND TEACHERS AT NEWQUAY EVANGELICAL CHURCH, CORNWALL who are raising money for the New Hope Children's Home in Cambodia. So far they have £150 and they are hoping to raise more.

We will be letting them know very soon what we are going to buy for the Home. A big 'thank you' from the Trustees.

Lynn Firth, Trustee

THE BULLETIN

The General Data Protection Legislation (GDPR) which came into force in May has had a big impact upon all charities, including our own.

Our Bulletin mailing list is now reduced from over 700 to 240 supporters. It seems inevitable that our income is going to be reduced.

Please help us re-build our support by asking your friends if they have replied to our recent appeal for supporters. If not, they can contact us through the website: www.msavlc.org

Or, if you receive your Bulletin by email, please consider reverting to having it sent by post, as we have lots of copies to spare and we have found that it is a more effective way of raising awareness of our work.

Many thanks,

Peter Lidgard.