

## Wife of U.S. Vice President Visits Laos



Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of the Vice President of the United States Joe Biden, visited Laos from July 21-22. She was accompanied by Catherine Russell, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. During their visit, they discussed educational opportunities for women and girls and highlighted the growing partnership between the United States and Laos.

A strong supporter of education and an educator herself, Dr. Biden met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Sports, Dr. Phankham Viphavanhnh, to learn about the Lao education system. The United States is committed to supporting education in Laos through a \$27 million school feeding program, English instruction for Lao officials and students, and a range of scholarships and exchange programs.

In recognition of the importance of youth in the development of Laos, Dr. Biden gave a speech at the Lao Youth Union. During her speech she expressed appreciation for the growing partnership between the United States and Laos and recognized the pivotal role that youth play in building a relationship for the 21st century. "Forty years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine that I would be here. Forty years ago we had just ended a very painful conflict in this region that deeply affected both our countries. The world has changed since then. While we can't change the past, we can shape the future together. Today, we are writing a new chapter in our history - a new chapter that starts with you, the students. You are the future," said Dr. Biden.

As part of her commitment to women's empowerment, Dr. Biden visited the Lao Disabled Women's Development Centre where she met with Director Chanhpheng Sivila. Dr. Biden delivered remarks at a reception for prominent Lao women leaders held at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, Daniel A. Clune.

To further demonstrate her support for education, Dr. Biden visited the U.S. supported Library Boat programme in Luang Prabang. Operated by Luang Prabang Public Library and Cooperative Learning International, the programme brings books to children in more than 75 remote villages.

She also met with the Director of the World Food Programme in Laos, Ms. Sarah Gordon-Gibson, to learn about the U.S. Food for Education programme.

During her visit, Dr. Biden learned about Laos' rich and unique cultural heritage. She participated in a baci ceremony at the U.S. Embassy and visited Wat Xieng Thong in Luang Prabang. She observed firsthand the important work of the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, which funded the restoration of Wat Xieng Thong and preserved its intricate artwork.

Dr. Biden is the first representative from the White House to ever visit Laos. This historic visit demonstrates the United States' continued commitment to expanding its relationship with Laos. This year marks the 60th year of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Prior to visiting Laos, Dr. Biden traveled to the Republic of Korea and Vietnam.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR