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## Vietnam

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## Vietnam

by Zach Wall [ Mine Action Information Center ]



Vietnam, a country of more than 85 million people,<sup>1</sup> has one of the world's highest rates of disabled citizens—greater than 6 percent of the entire population.<sup>2</sup> That figure is partially attributable to contamination by landmines and unexploded ordnance, which encroaches on more than 60,000 square kilometers (23,166 square miles) and up to one-fifth of the country's land surface. As a result, the *Landmine Monitor Report* has estimated that there are currently some 66,380 survivors of mines and explosive remnants of war<sup>3</sup> in Vietnam—4,000 of

whom received survivor services in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

Three decades after the Vietnam-American War, the threat from mines, UXO and other ERW persists in Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces. These areas are among the most heavily contaminated in the nation, with more than 500 mine-related casualties reported since 2000.<sup>4</sup> Quang Tri province in central Vietnam in particular is one of the most seriously afflicted regions in the world. Since the end of the Vietnam-American War, nearly 7,000 casualties have been reported in this province alone—exceeding casualty totals to date for entire countries such as Bosnia & Herzegovina, Ethiopia and Kosovo, to name just a few.<sup>5</sup>

### Survivor Assistance and Mine-risk Education

Vietnam has not acceded to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention,<sup>6</sup> and although the Ministry of National Defense coordinates clearance activities, there is currently no national comprehensive mine-action program in place. In lieu of government programs to provide MRE and survivor assistance, a number of international and nongovernmental organizations have intervened on behalf of the Vietnamese people since the 1990s.

**NGOs bridging gaps in MRE.** In a country as heavily contaminated as Vietnam, where 40 percent of all victims of mine/UXO accidents are under the age of 18,<sup>7</sup> the tremendous need for adequate MRE is apparent. In 2006, more than 878,143 Vietnamese citizens in six provinces received education about the dangers of mines, and more than 900 new MRE personnel received training that same year.<sup>4</sup>

In Quang Tri province, a 2002 Project RENEW™ survey indicated that MRE initiatives have greatly contributed to curbing casualty rates by some 50 percent in recent years. A resounding 80 percent of respondents indicated having received some form of MRE, usually via mass media (television or radio).<sup>5</sup>

For some, however, there are serious impediments to receiving MRE. The destitute and those living in remote areas are not only much more likely to suffer mine-related accidents but also are less likely to receive adequate MRE.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, there are a handful of NGOs working diligently to alleviate the geography and poverty gaps in mine awareness for Vietnamese citizens.

**Victim-assistance efforts.** On 22 October 2007,<sup>8</sup> Vietnam signed the *U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*,<sup>9</sup> an agreement intended to advance the political, social and economic rights of disabled persons universally by monitoring government activities pertaining to disability. Vietnam had not yet ratified the Convention as of July 2008.

Although the government has initiatives in place to accommodate the country's sizeable disabled population, they are insufficient in key ways. The Ministries of Health and Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, provide health-care and rehabilitation services for disabled persons. Access to these services, however, is logistically inaccessible for poor or rural citizens. In addition, government-sponsored economic reintegration programs exist but are limited.<sup>4</sup>

As such, various NGOs work to provide victim assistance in the form of medical care, physical rehabilitation, assistive devices and socioeconomic readjustment programs to disabled Vietnamese, particularly the impoverished and those in rural areas.

**Project RENEW.** Launched in 2000 by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Project RENEW has been instrumental in providing both MRE and survivor assistance to the people of Quang Tri province. MRE efforts in Hai Lang and Trien Phong districts have directly reached more than 40,000 people, while television and radio spots have reached an estimated half-million more.<sup>10, 5</sup>

In addition to promoting mine-risk education, Project RENEW provides emergency medical services and offers economic reintegration programs that have benefited hundreds. As of 2006, more than 300 survivors had received prostheses and orthoses, and several hundred survivor families had participated in mushroom farming and other agricultural programs developed to provide vocational training and generate income.<sup>11</sup>

**Clear Path International.** Clear Path International assists landmine survivors in Vietnam, Cambodia and along the Thai-Burmese border. In 2006, Clear Path Vietnam provided support to 88 survivors.<sup>7</sup>

In December 2007, CPI Vietnam was awarded the Certificate of Merit by the Provincial People's Committee of Quang Tri province. In that province alone, CPI Vietnam has provided services to more than 3,000 survivors and spent US\$860,000 on survivor-assistance programs. In total, 4,664 survivors in 14 provinces have received emergency medical care, surgery, prostheses and other services since 2000. In 2008, CPI Vietnam will expand its operations to encompass four new districts: Dong Ha, Quang Ninh, A Luoi and Dai Luc.<sup>12</sup>

**PeaceTrees Vietnam.** Founded in 1996 and also headquartered in Quang Tri province, PeaceTrees Vietnam plays a role in mine/UXO-clearance efforts and mine-risk education, and has provided survivor

assistance to 600 families. Over the past decade, PeaceTrees has built over 100 homes and implemented household economic-assistance programs that have helped dozens of families.<sup>13</sup> A microcredit lending program offering five-year loans to survivor families ended in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

In partnership with the Women's Union of Quang Tri, the Committee for Population, Families and Children in Quang Tri province and the People's Committee of Quang Tri province, PeaceTrees Vietnam has operated the Danaan Perry Landmine Education Center since 1998.<sup>13</sup> The facility provides mine-risk education information to visitors and provides training to volunteers interested in promoting awareness in their own communities.

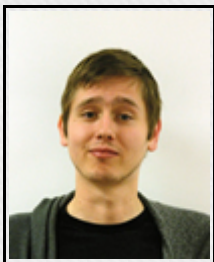
**Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped.** VNAH commemorated 16 years of service in December 2007. In those 16 years, it has provided more than 48,000 assistive devices and 3,000 wheelchairs to disabled individuals in every province.<sup>2</sup>

That same year, the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement awarded VNAH a \$100,000 grant for a mine-risk education campaign in Nghe An province. According to a VNAH news release, the program is anticipated to reach hundreds of thousands of children in two highly contaminated areas of Nghe An. Materials for MRE will be developed and distributed to hundreds of schools in the province.<sup>14</sup> Additional funding was awarded to VNAH in 2006 by American Schools and Hospitals Abroad for a rehabilitation facility in Da Nang Binh Dan General Hospital in Da Nang, scheduled for completion in late 2007.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

The organizational sketches above detail just a few of the ongoing efforts of NGOs to improve the conditions for landmine/ERW survivors in Vietnam and to help those survivors persevere in spite of social inequities. A number of organizations, including those listed above, as well as other international NGOs such as UNICEF, Catholic Relief Services and the International Committee of the Red Cross, are committed to fostering relationships with local communities for mine-risk-education and victim-assistance purposes. These partnerships will undoubtedly help to ameliorate many of the perils associated with Vietnam's troubled past for the current and future generations. 🌱

## Biography



**Zach Wall** has been with the Mine Action Information Center as an Editorial Assistant since September 2007. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in sociology at James Madison University.

## Endnotes

1. "Vietnam." *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>. Accessed 31 March 2008
2. "VNAH: Welcome." *Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped*. <http://vnah-hev.org/index.php> Accessed 31 March 2008.
3. **Editor's Note:** Some organizations consider mines and ERW to be two separate entities, since they are regulated by different legal documents (the former by the Ottawa Convention and Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the latter by CCW Protocol V). However, since mines are explosive devices that have similar effects to other ERW and it is often impossible to separate the two during clearance operations, some in the community have adopted a "working definition" (as opposed to a legal one) of



ERW in which it is a blanket term that includes mines, UXO, abandoned explosive ordnance and other explosive devices.

4. "Vietnam." *Landmine Monitor Report 2007*. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/vietnam.html>. Accessed 31 March 2008.
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6. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Oslo, Norway. 18 September 1997. <http://www.icbl.org/treaty/text/english>. Accessed 21 August 2008. The document was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, 3 December 1997, and thus is commonly known as the Ottawa Convention.
7. "Vietnam: Clear Path Responded to 88 New Victims of Bombs, Landmines, and Other Munitions." *Reuters*. 18 December 2007.
8. "Convention and Optional Protocol Signatories and Ratifications." *United Nations Enable*. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?navid=12&pid=166>. Accessed 9 July 2008.
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## Contact Information

Zach Wall  
 Editorial Assistant  
*Journal of Mine Action*  
 Mine Action Information Center  
 E-mail: [maic\(at\)jmu.edu](mailto:maic(at)jmu.edu)



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