

# U.S. Efforts Strengthen Pledge to Vietnam

**The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund estimates that 2,000 Vietnamese are killed each year by mines and UXO. In response to this, the U.S. government, VVMF and Clear Path International are focusing on the country's landmine victims.**

By Stacy L. Smith, MAIC

In November 2000, former President Bill Clinton traveled to Vietnam to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. At a ceremony honoring efforts to clear an estimated 3 million landmines and 300,000 tons of UXO scattered throughout Vietnam, Clinton vowed to help remove mine threats in Vietnam, Africa and the Balkans. He said: "You will have America's support until you have found every landmine and every piece of unexploded ordnance. This is a tragedy for which peace produces no answer."

In June 2000, the U.S. government allocated \$3.1 million (U.S.) to support humanitarian demining efforts in Vietnam. Of this total, \$1.7 million will go towards the purchase of equipment such as vehicles, personal safety gear and landmine/UXO detectors; \$1.4 million will be designated for a level one national survey to determine the scope of the

landmine problem and make recommendations for resolving it; \$200,000 will be allotted to develop a computer system to record the locations and types of ordnance used during the Vietnam War; and \$80,000 will be used for a computer system to assist the Vietnamese in managing their demining program.

Following Clinton's promise to rid Vietnam of landmines, two non-profit organizations, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and Clear Path International, introduced projects intended to stop the deaths of innocent civilians from escalating. Currently, an average of six deaths occur daily in Vietnam as a result of landmines/UXO.

### Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

#### Project RENEW

On Dec. 4, 2000, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) revealed a plan to form the first-ever

comprehensive program targeted at saving lives and preventing injuries in Vietnam. The two-year pilot project in Trieu Phong District of Vietnam's Quang Tri province is designed "to restore the use of lands of the Vietnamese through education and neutralization of the effects of the Vietnam war." The non-profit organization's model for landmine/UXO clearance is called Project RENEW. According to Jan C. Scruggs, VVMF president, Project RENEW combines the efforts of several international NGOs, including PeaceTrees Vietnam, Catholic Relief Services and Counterpart International, with the Quang Tri Province People's Committee in Vietnam. "We plan to show that a comprehensive approach benefits the people of Quang Tri province," Scruggs said, "and also the organizations that are assisting with this effort. We also hope to show that government agencies and non-governmental groups can work successfully together."

### Assessing the Situation

According to a Dec. 4, 2000, VVMF press release, Vietnamese officials estimate that approximately 2,000 civilian deaths result each year from landmines/UXO. Since the end of the war in 1975, approximately 40,000 civilian deaths have been caused by landmines/UXO with nearly 1,500 of those occurring in Trieu Phong District. VVMF hopes that Project RENEW will reduce the risks that landmines/UXO pose to civilians.

In the early planning stages of the program, VVMF met with officials from international NGOs, the Vietnamese government, and the U.S. Department of State to discuss Vietnam's landmine/UXO problem. "We were told time and time again that a single comprehensive effort was needed," Scruggs said. With the help of international NGOs and the Quang Tri Province People's Committee, Project RENEW will accomplish its all-inclusive goal through mine education and awareness, mine clearance, land resettlement and victim assistance. "We feel that by several different groups helping with this effort, we will be able to make significant progress in a shorter amount of time and the people of Quang Tri will benefit significantly from the collaborative system," Scruggs said.

### Projections

With matching \$250,000 grants from the E\*TRADE Group, Inc., a global leader in online personal financial services based in Menlo Park, Calif., and the Freeman Foundation in Stowe, Vt., an office of international cooperation will be established in Quang Tri province as a center for information exchange between all parties. The center will also address potential problems and obstacles arising during the pilot project. If successful, VVMF hopes to implement Project RENEW in other mine-affected countries such as Laos and Cambodia. "We have a lot of work to do in Vietnam before we move on to other countries," Scruggs said. "What we hope to have after two years is a useful approach that can easily be implemented in other affected lands."

### Clear Path International

#### Current Projects

In December 2000, Clear Path International began a two-year project in Vietnam that will clear 125 acres of land for later construction of housing in Dong Ha Town, Quang Tri province. During the Vietnam War, the clearance site head-quartered the U.S. 3rd Marine Division and was known as Dong Ha Combat Base. According to Martha Hathaway, project director for Vietnam, this project will eliminate the fears of local

children and their families. "For 30 years, the people of Vietnam have lived with the threat of landmines and bombs in their communities," she said. "Clear Path International hopes to remove these obstacles that stand in the way of the health and safety of children in Vietnam." The project hopes to rid the area of the threat of landmines/UXO on two levels: mine clearance and victim assistance.

Mine clearance will be executed with the help of UXB International, a commercial humanitarian demining company in Ashburn, Va. UXB International will provide management, technical supervision, equipment and accommodations for demining teams. It will also train local Vietnamese deminers to carry out the clearance of landmines and UXO using safe techniques and procedures. Hathaway believes that a methodical demining process is key to a successful clearance project. She said, "Clear Path International believes that the most paramount concerns are safety and quality, and in order to ensure safety and quality the process of clearance is time and resource intensive."

In addition to the clearance project, Clear Path International is also working to facilitate accident survivors in the area. While the organization primarily benefits children who have sustained debilitating injuries as a result of landmine or UXO explosions, the program also provides monetary compensation to the families of affected children. With the support of





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the Committee for the Care and Protection of Children, Clear Path International is able to give injured children emergency medical treatment, surgery, long-term health care, nutritional support and special scholarships. Funding for this project was received from a grant from the Freeman Foundation and contributions from individuals and foundations such as the Francis Finlay Foundation.

### **The Mission**

Clear Path International is a non-profit organization founded in September 2000. Its efforts are concentrated in the war-torn countries of Southeast Asia. The goals of the organization include raising awareness of the landmine/UXO problem, providing money and resources for demining and victim assistance projects, and sponsoring programs to remove landmines/UXO and assist victims of landmine/UXO explosions. Through these goals, Clear Path International hopes to accomplish its mission: to clear obstacles that stand in the way of the health, safety and development of children and their families.

### **A Plan for the Future**

Clear Path International hopes to empower local residents and agencies in mine-affected countries by creating "an in-country capacity that can sustain the demining and victim assistance activities well into the future, independently or with minimal

support from the international community." By involving local residents and agencies from the start, "a handover of management and implementation of the project(s) to a team of qualified domestic deminers with only periodic technical monitoring from the contractor, but with the presence of a full-time Clear Path International representative" is possible. For the time being, Clear Path International's efforts on behalf of the health, safety and development of mine-affected children and their families will be limited to Vietnam and Cambodia. In the future, the organization hopes to expand its project scope to Laos and Thailand.

### **Conclusion**

While President Clinton's pledge to the Vietnamese government has led to dedicated efforts to rid Vietnam of landmines/UXO, the Bush administration has yet to make a statement on the future of U.S. involvement in landmine policy. Before leaving office, Clinton commented on the progress of his administration and encouraged the Bush administration to maintain U.S. efforts. "While I am proud that we have made substantial progress towards eliminating the threat landmines pose to innocent civilians around the world," Clinton wrote on Jan. 19, 2001, "there is work yet to be done. I urge the next administration to build on our progress and take the steps necessary to allow the United States to eventually sign the Ottawa

Convention, while still meeting our security needs and protecting our men and women in uniform." ■

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