Thailand

Country Profile

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THAILAND

History
Political corruption and social unrest have plagued Thailand for the past 30 years. In addition, external conflict with Cambodia, Burma, China and France and concern over communist guerrilla attacks from the north and from the Thai-Malaysian border have detracted from movement towards a stable infrastructure and a democratic society. Since 1932, numerous attempts to overthrow the Thai government have been unsuccessful. In November 1971, a military government was established to regulate a dwindling economy and control pervasive guerrilla activities that posed a threat to Thailand's borders. Most landmine and UXO activity is concentrated around these borders.

Landmines/UXO Overview
In Thailand, landmines and UXO affect 18 provinces and cover 796 sq. km of land. Of these 19 mine-affected provinces, AP landmines and UXO are most heavily concentrated in seven provinces lining the Thai-Cambodian border. Although the Thai military no longer lays landmines, the proliferation of landmines along the Thai-Burma border continues. New mines are often laid by Burmese and Burmese refugees on the border. An estimated 100,000 mines exist across the country, according to the Landmine Monitor Report 2000. As reported to the United Nations on Jan. 31, 2000, Thailand stockpiles approximately 41,162 AP mines.

Casualties
In a 30-year span, from 1969 to 1999, 561 fighters occurred in Thailand as a result of landmine explosions. A list of these victims is published by the Thailand Mine Action Center (TMAC). In addition, a total of 1,849 deaths and injuries have resulted from landmine explosions. Treatment for landmine victims comes from the Thai government, army and local NGOs, and is often in the form of medical, prosthetic, psychosocial and rehabilitative assistance.

Demining
On Dec. 3, 1997, Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to sign and ratify the Mine Ban Treaty. Under the treaty, Thailand proposes to rid its border areas of landmines in three years. Through the implementation of mine programs, the education of mine awareness and the rehabilitation of mine victims, TMAC hopes to accomplish these goals. TMAC has already supervised the destruction of 10,000 AP mines and plans to destroy all stockpiled mines under the Master Plan for Humanitarian Mine Action for 2000-2004. Plans are also underway to conduct a survey of the socioeconomic effects of landmines in Thailand.

REALITY CHECK
In October 1997, the ratification of a new constitution increased human rights protection in Thailand. Still, the most serious human rights issue is the Thai government's treatment of refugees in camps along Thailand's borders with Burma and Cambodia. Human Rights Watch cites fear of the growing number of unemployed and the government's inability to ease the hardship as concern for future political and social conflict.

VIETNAM

History
Following the Vietnam War (1959-1975), the use of landmines between divided Vietnamese troops was widespread. Heavily bombarded areas during the war proved to contain the most concentrated areas of UXO. As a result, the Mine Technology Center in Hanoi estimates that 350,000 tons of landmines are undetected along Vietnam's borders and within its fields. Today, the Vietnamese government focuses on restoring political stability and reforming economic standards that deteriorated following the Vietnam War. For the most part, mine action, awareness and education are carried out by local NGOs and internationally funded mine programs.

Landmines/UXO Overview
As a result of conflicts with China and Cambodia, the U.S. Department of State estimates there to be 3.5 million landmines in Vietnam's 61 provinces, in addition to unidentified amounts of UXO. Of this, 350,000 tons of landmines remain hidden over a total of 16,478 sq. km of land. According to the Landmine Monitor Report 2000, these figures are believed to be widely underestimated since the country has never stopped production of landmines. Although all of the provinces in Vietnam are affected, Quang Tri Province, along the old Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), is said to have the largest concentration of landmines and UXO from the heavy fighting along the DMZ.

Casualties
Mine-related injuries account for 15 percent of Vietnam's total disabled population. According to a nationwide survey conducted in September 1999 by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOSUSA), 38,248 people have been killed and 64,054 people have been injured since the end of the Vietnam War, an estimate of 180 casualties per month. Often victims are treated at health stations provided by the Vietnamese government, but more often victims who cannot afford expensive medical treatment and rehabilitative costs turn to international organizations offering disability programs.

Demining
From 1975-1985, 15 to 20 percent of explosives remaining from the war were cleared by the People's Army of Vietnam. Projects started in 1999 and 2000 have paved the way for mine action. In addition to five internationally funded landmine/UXO projects, the Vietnamese army has plans to destroy 2,000 tons of AP mines in 2000. Projections by the Ministry of Defense indicate that clearance of landmines and UXO in Vietnam would require 10 years and would cost $4 billion to $5 billion. Since plans to establish a mine action center in Vietnam have not yet been approved by the Vietnamese government, Quang Tri Province has taken its own demining and clearance initiatives. With the help of JMM's Mine Awareness Program, the Quang Tri People's Committee is developing the Mine Action Master Plan for mine awareness education and landmine/UXO assessment.

REALITY CHECK
Internal political and social strife continues on all levels in Vietnam. Rural unrest, beginning in 1997, persists with civilians objecting to high prices and excessive taxation. In addition, conflict between reformers and conservatives continues to thwart progression towards a stable infrastructure.

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