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News Brief

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News Brief

U.S. and Vietnam Sign Memorandum of Understanding

On 16 December 2013, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam David Shear signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on explosive remnants of war (ERW) cooperation.¹ Bui Hong Linh, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), signed the MOU for Vietnam. The memorandum is important, said Linh, as it broadly outlines areas for cooperation between the two countries to confront ERW in Vietnam.²

Following the signing of this MOU, the government of Vietnam announced the establishment of the Vietnam National Mine Action Centre on 14 March 2014 during the Development Partnership Conference on Mine Action. In attendance at the conference, Deputy Assistant Secretary Samuel Perez noted that the MOU on ERW cooperation illustrates the U.S. commitment to helping Vietnam address war legacy issues.

According to the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor*, 104,973 mine/ERW casualties (38,940 killed/66,033 injured) occurred

in Vietnam through 2012. Reported casualties in 2012 (18 killed/53 injured/two unknown) showed a significant increase over previous years, but the reason for the increase is unknown.³

Vietnam's UXO contamination stems from three decades of conflict, beginning with the communist uprising against French Colonial power in the 1940s and ending with the 1975 fall of Saigon. Despite years of clearance efforts, some areas in Vietnam remain highly contaminated by UXO and landmines, especially the central region and the Vietnam-Laos border.⁴

A Vietnamese Ministry of Defense 2009 survey states that UXO contaminates approximately 35 percent of the country's central region.⁵ In a 2002 survey, MOLISA reported that UXO contaminates 6.6 million hectares (16.3 million acres) of Vietnamese land, not including maritime areas. MOLISA also noted that only 20 percent of UXO were found and defused.¹ ©

~ Chloë Cunningham, CISR staff
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