

# Humanitarian Landmine Action in China and the Role of the NGO

Though China is not a State Party to the Ottawa Convention,<sup>1</sup> the country has long been involved in humanitarian efforts to alleviate the landmine problem. Nationally, China has launched mine-clearance campaigns, and has become a State Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.<sup>2</sup> Two organizations have also been established to alleviate the landmine problem. Internationally, China has sponsored several mine-clearance workshops, and has promoted international partnerships to work toward mine clearance.

by Zhai Dequan [ China Arms Control and Disarmament Association ]

Being a State Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Amended Protocol II,<sup>3</sup> China has made tremendous efforts to promote exchanges and cooperation with the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention. China attaches great importance to the humanitarian issues of landmines and supports the efforts of the international community to address the problems<sup>4</sup> caused by wanton and abusive use of landmines, which have inflicted heavy casualties on human lives and properties.

In the 1990s, China successfully undertook two major campaigns to clear the landmines in the provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi, removing the threats to the local civilians. This effort helped restore the local environment, rehabilitate victims and ensure the safety of border trade. In the two mine-clearing campaigns of 1992–1994 and 1997–1999, China cleared 300 square kilometers (116 square miles) of 830,000 landmines and pieces of UXO along the Chinese-Vietnamese border, and demolished 700 metric tons (772 tons) of old munitions and explosives without committing a single error.

When it ratified the CCW Amended Protocol II in 1998, China indicated it would exercise the optional nine-year deferral period for compliance with key restrictions. It has since entered into a dialogue with signatories to the Ottawa Convention.

China has done much since 1998 to further advances in mine action. For example, in 1999 and 2000, China sponsored two

mine-clearing training courses for the personnel from seven mine-affected countries: Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia and Rwanda. China also donated US\$100,000 to the U.N. Voluntary Trust Fund for mine clearance in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 2001, China provided mine-detecting and clearance equipment worth \$1.26 million to seven mine-affected countries: Cambodia, Namibia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique.

In 2002, as part of a bilateral border agreement with Vietnam, China started new mine-action activities in Guangxi and Yunnan. China and Vietnam agreed to complete the Technical Survey of mined areas by the year 2005,<sup>5</sup> and it was completed on time.



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In 2002 and 2003, China sent two mine-clearing expert teams to Eritrea to train 120 local personnel and directed them to clear part of the mined areas.<sup>6</sup> From September to



Chinese deminers in action.

December 2005, China sent an expert mine-clearing group to Thailand to train the local personnel with Chinese-aided equipment. Representatives from China have also attended numerous mine-related meetings around the world.

In April 2004, an international workshop on humanitarian mine- and unexploded ordnance-clearance technology and cooperation in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan province in southwestern China, was co-sponsored by the Arms Control Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association and the Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.<sup>7</sup> Representatives from 13 countries and eight international organizations and nongovernmental organizations were present. All the Chinese speakers at the opening ceremony acknowledged the need to address the continuing humanitarian



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Chinese demining equipment in operation.

crisis caused by landmines and unexploded munitions. The workshop featured an extensive exchange of views from research findings, mine-risk education, mine-victim assistance, rehabilitation and community reconstruction to mine-action standards, increased regional cooperation, and shared experiences in mine-action efficiency and technologies, including mechanical, explosive and manual practices.

On 28 October 2005, the Chinese delegation voted for Resolution L56 to implement the Ottawa Convention. This significant act shows that China attaches importance to the role of the Convention and identifies with its final aim. It also shows that China is ready to join hands with the other States Parties to render new contributions to the thorough resolution of the humanitarian problems caused by AP mines. In November 2005, the Chinese Observers Delegation attended the Sixth Conference of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in Zagreb.

## NGO and Corporate Activities in China

The China Arms Control and Disarmament Association,<sup>8</sup> founded in August 2001 in Beijing, is the only nationwide nonprofit nongovernmental organization in China in the area of arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. While CACDA is active in promoting domestic and international cooperation in mine action, it is also energetic in addressing the problems caused by AP mines by cosponsoring workshops or seminars for academic exchanges of demining experiences and techniques, and updating equipment.

Among CACDA's dozens of corporate members, there is one called Huakai Security Science and Technologies Co. Ltd., which is a private enterprise solely devoted to mine clearance. It was established in November 2004 after being approved by China's State Department of Industrial and Commercial Administration. Huakai has a team of proficient and well-disciplined experts in mine clearance. Many of the personnel are demobilized former military officers and engineers from the Engineers Corps of the People's Liberation Army of China.

Huakai has established two training facilities in Nanjing and Kunming to train international deminers. Huakai's mine-clearance equipment is ranked among the best in the world. It was tested and proven in the mine-clearance campaigns of the 1990s for its practicability,

reliability, simplicity, operability, and low cost—all of which are particularly suitable for mine-clearance activities in developing countries.

Compared to organizations in other countries, CACDA and Huakai are novices. Their goal is to contribute to humanitarian mine clearance and improve the lives of those in need by working in partnership with other organizations. Recently, CACDA and Handicap International–Belgium cosponsored a documentary film about mine action. It is designed to be used for mine-risk education. The film covered the whole process of eliminating landmine hazards—from the devastation of human lives, loss of livestock and property to humanitarian-demining activities and rehabilitation with domestic and foreign assistance to community reconstruction. Another MRE film the company developed details the history of landmine development; the present international mine-action institutions and systems; conventions, protocols and agreements to limit, ban or destroy landmines; rules, regulations and mine-action standards; technological elaboration of landmine types, composition and their uses; reading markings; and demining methods and techniques. The film is designed to raise the landmine-risk awareness of the community.

## China's Demining Future

Although the need for mine clearance in the mine-affected countries of the world is extensive and demanding, the usual practice of multilateral cooperation among states, international institutions, enterprises and/or NGOs often falls short of a total solution to the problem. Therefore, it is necessary for all the parties to explore new ways to cooperate with one another, such as working on the same project, dividing work equitably and taking full advantage of human and financial resources, information, technologies, equipment, management, etc. The United Nations' institutions must continue to be involved in organizing, coordinating and monitoring various actors. ♦

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