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Vietnam

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Although the Vietnam War ended over 30 years ago, landmines still pose a significant threat to the country's population. American, South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese and French forces all relied on landmines from the 1950s onward. These mines are scattered throughout Vietnam and continue to kill innocent people every day. According to the latest nationwide statistics released by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, since the end of the war in 1975, 38,849 people have died as the result of landmine accidents and 65,852 have been injured by the approximate three million mines in Vietnam.¹

One of the most mine-affected areas in the country is Quang Tri province, where about 60 percent of the Vietnam War² occurred. In this province, an estimated 43 percent of the land contains mines or UXO. Because of this high level of contamination, about 10,000 residents of Quang Tri have been disabled due to mine/UXO accidents.³ Official estimates of the mine/UXO problem nationwide range from 350,000 to 800,000 tons of ordnance in the ground. There is an average density of 46 tons per square kilometer (119 tons per square mile) or 280 kilograms (617 pounds) of UXO per capita.¹

Mine Action Planning and Funding

According to the 2005 *Landmine Monitor Report*, the Vietnamese government has officially stated that it has spent hundreds of billions of dong⁴ each year on military demining since the end of the war. However, the government of Vietnam currently does not have a national strategy for mine action.¹ In August 2004, Vietnamese officials said that the first step to establishing a national strategy for mine action was to complete a mine/UXO impact assessment in order to set priorities for clearance.¹



Several other governments also contribute funds to support Vietnam's mine action efforts. According to the *Landmine Monitor*, four countries contributed almost \$5 million (U.S.), namely Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States. These funds helped programs such as survey operations, clearance projects of several organizations and a UNICEF MRE project. Additionally, "international mine action NGOs working in Vietnam received funds from a variety of additional bilateral, multilateral and private sources in 2004."¹

Mine Risk Education

Catholic Relief Services provides mine risk education for those who live in Quang Tri province with an emphasis on teachers, women and children as a means to decrease the death toll. CRS holds workshops and shows commercials and videos to the students, who later become landmine educators for others in the community. The staff continually updates information and statistics for those living in the area. CRS also offers a response team to aid victims.

Organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped, and Handicap International have established rehabilitation programs and orthopedic centers throughout Vietnam. These programs not only offer health services but also provide prosthetic limbs and socio-economic rehabilitation programs.

The number of victims has decreased as public awareness grows through school programs and television ads. In 2004, eight organizations participated in mine risk education in Vietnam. UNICEF, Project RENEW, Catholic Relief Services, PeaceTrees Vietnam, *Solidaritatsdienst-International*, PK, Australian Volunteers International, and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped focused their efforts on injury prevention campaigns, MRE courses for teachers and other intensive safety projects.¹

Demining Efforts

Most of the popular mines used in Vietnam were made of plastic; therefore they are hard for deminers to detect with conventional metal detectors. American soldiers are now in the process of teaching local Vietnamese workers to deactivate the landmines. In 2004, international mine action organizations worked to clear 18,131 items of UXO and 105 mines from approximately 3.9 square kilometers (1.5 square miles) of land.¹ PeaceTrees Vietnam, a non-profit humanitarian organization, works to sponsor mine clearance in Vietnam by planting trees in areas formerly impacted by mines. In 2005, PeaceTrees planted over 2,000 trees in Vietnam and sponsored the removal of mines by Vietnamese deminers.⁵

Conclusion

The landmines littering Vietnam have left psychological and physical scars on its citizens. The legacy of the Vietnam War—thousands, perhaps millions, of landmines, bombs, artillery shells, mortar rounds, grenades and other lethal unexploded ordnance—continues to kill many innocent children and adults today. Hope remains, though, as several demining and mine risk education projects have begun in the past few years, and with continued demining efforts, Vietnam will one day make itself safe from landmines.

Endnotes

1. "Vietnam." *Landmine Monitor Report 2005*. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2000/vietnam.html>, Accessed Dec. 13, 2005.
2. The Vietnamese refer to this as the American War.
3. "Brief History of the Area". Adopt-A-Minefield. <http://www.landmines.org.uk/377>. Updated July 14, 2005. Accessed Jan. 26, 2005.
4. As of Feb. 9, 2006, the U.S. dollar was worth 15,926 dong. <http://www.xe.com/ucc/convert.cgi>. Accessed Feb. 9, 2006.
5. "Reversing the Legacy of War" PeaceTrees Vietnam. <http://www.peacetreesvietnam.org/HTML/faq.htm>. Accessed Jan. 26, 2005.
6. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed Nov. 27, 2005.

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