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Myanmar

Country Profile
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LAOS

Lao People's Democratic Republic

History
The first united kingdom of Laos, Lan Xang, was established in June 1354, when Fa Ngum was crowned king. The kingdom covered much of modern Thailand. In 1690, Lan Xang fell to a series of invasions and was split into three kingdoms. It was not reunited again until 1893, when France joined upper and lower Laos as part of French Indochina. Laos gained official independence from France in 1949, but the growth of communism and anti-communist factions prevented the formation of any unified government until 1975.

A protracted civil war broke out in 1960 between the Pathet Lao, a communist faction headed by the North Vietnamese, and government forces backed by the Thai and South Vietnamese. In 1973, a ceasefire was reached, and a new coalition government was formed. The Pathet Lao gained control in 1975, after a series of communist victories in Vietnam and Cambodia. The Pathet Lao established the first Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Landmines/UXO Overview
Laos is not known to produce or export AP mines. It is thought that Laos does maintain a stockpile of mines, but the amount is unknown. There is no evidence of recent use of AP mines by Lao military. Although there are AP mines present in Laos, the primary threat to civilians is UXO. Bombing during the Indochina War, especially from 1964-1973, resulted in the release of tons of cluster bomb units that did not explode on impact as planned. There is an unknown number of UXO in Laos, estimated by various sources to be between 500,000 and several million. Handicap International reported in 1997 that over 3,800 villages, with a population of 1.3 million, have been affected by UXO and mines. The serious landmine problem causes not only the risk of causality, but it also affects Laos by adding time, expense and hazard to new economic development. Land denial and barriers to development are pressing issues. The UXO problem has profound effects on food production, infrastructure development, water and sanitation, school, and hospital additions, and other important economic development.

Casualties
A survey done by hand in early 2000 stated that from 1973-1996, there were 13,711 casualties from landmine accidents and 9,473 victims of UXO accidents. During the first four years after the war, on average, there were 750 UXO accidents per year. The number has now dropped to an average of 240 accidents per year.

Demining
In 1996, the government established a national office, the UXO Lao, to coordinate UXO clearance and awareness and implement a national UXO strategy and demining projects. UXO Lao is one of the nation's largest employers, with over 1,000 employees. There are several programs involved in mine/UXO clearance in Laos. MAG, HI, NPA, World Vision Australia, Gerbera and MiSearch all support demining efforts in Laos. In 1999, 622 hectares of land were cleared, and 90,000 mines were destroyed. In addition, 178,846 people were provided with UXO awareness information. More than 951,000 people benefited from the operations. UXO Lao had set target goals for 2000 to clear 1,005 hectares of land in 857 villages, destroying approximately 100,000 UXO. They also have plans to visit more than 759 villages with mine awareness programs for over 190,000 people.

MYANMAR

Burma

From 1942-1945, when British rule was restored, the Japanese occupied Myanmar, also known as Burma. In 1948, the British granted Myanmar independence, allowing the country to establish a policy of neutrality and isolation in international affairs. This policy was strained by Chinese pressure in the northeast. A 1960 boundary treaty between the two countries has eased tensions. A U.N. elected prime minister ruled from 1960 to 1962, until Ne Win staged a coup. Win disband the parliament, abandoned the constitution and began nationalizing industry. In 1974, Myanmar became a one-party socialist republic. Win stepped down in 1981, but remained chairman of the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Lao Communist government with biological and chemical weapons. The weapons have been used to kill Hmong and Loatians in Laos since the end of the Vietnam War. Reports indicate that the landmine problem is widespread in Myanmar. Tatmadaw units, active near army bases in the Tenasserim Division, patrol and during operations in the Tenasserim Division. The number of UXO and mine victims die from 1998, report that it produces nearly one civilian landmine amputee per day. Reports also state that 30 percent of landmine victims die prior to any medical care.

Demining
There are no humanitarian demining operations in Myanmar, though some of the ethnic groups have cleared mines. The Myanmar Red Cross is considering developing a landmine awareness program.

Reality Check
In attempts to overthrow the SPDC, armed ethnic parties have waged violent struggles. With no end in sight, the consequences of these conflicts are mounting. Tatmadaw units, active near Myanmar's border with Thailand, have been charged with making local civilians walk through suspected mine fields to trigger the bombs. This gruesome tactic, known as "human mine sweeping," is not limited to the Tatmadaw militia. Reports in late 1999 and early 2000 indicate that human mine sweeping is occurring in Karen State during military assaults on Shan State army locations and during operations against army bases in the Tenasserim Division.

Contact Information
The Union of Myanmar 2300 S Street NW Washington, D.C. 20008 Tel: 202-332-9044

Karen State, from 1998, report that it produces nearly one civilian landmine amputee per day. Reports also state that 30 percent of landmine victims die prior to any medical care.

Casualties
Estimates of landmine casualties in 1999 place the number at 1,500. In 1994, the U.S. Department of State estimated that landmines produced 1,500 victims per year, which suggests that the number of landmine victims per year has remained at a high level for the past five years. Statistics from Karen State report in late 1999 and early 2000 reveal that human mine sweeping is occurring in Karen State during military assaults on Shan State army locations and during operations against army bases in the Tenasserim Division.

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