

**REMARK IN REGIONAL WORKSHOP
CHALLENGES ON DEMINING AND VICTIM ASSISTANCE
(Bangkok - Thailand 30/8-01-9/2004)
Senior colonel: PHAN DUC TUAN – MOD Vietnam**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past 50 years, Vietnam has been suffering from the heavy consequences of consecutive wars with great amounts of landmine/UXO scattered all over the country. According to the statistics, in Vietnam War only, 15,350,000 tons of bombs and mines had been used by the Americans, creating an average density of 46 tons per km² or 280 kg per capita. According to a preliminary survey, the current estimated area of contamination is 66,660 km² (or 6.66 million ha), accounting for 20.11% of the country's surface. The area left fallow due to landmine/UXO presence is 4,359 km², making up 5.43% of country's total arable land. With such a huge area, the clearance of landmine/UXO in Vietnam is expected to take several decades.

Landmine/UXO contamination is a potential and long-term threat, making tremendous impacts on normal activities, psychology and health of the communities, polluting land and water sources, and hence disrupting the national socio-economic development and security.

According to the statistics up to 31 December 2000, **104,298** casualties had been reported, including **42,135** dead and **62,163** injured. These figures are assumed to be incomplete and only reflect those incidents reported to the local authorities. At the national average, over 2,000 people killed and injured annually.

Most landmines/UXO left over the wars in Vietnam are anti-personnel orientated and highly dangerous. Consequently, when an explosion occurs, it always causes a large number of casualties, of which most found limbed, blinded and burned, who have to suffer these injuries for the rest of their lives. Landmine/UXO victims are mainly children and breadwinners of the families, aged from 5 to 45, who are considered as the prospective masters as well as those currently playing the key role in the socio-economic development of the country respectively. Those surviving from the incidents become the burdens for their families and the whole society.

Right after the war, the Government of Vietnam has delegated the mission to conduct landmine/UXO clearance to the Engineering Command under the Ministry of Defence. Vietnamese demining soldiers have engaged in numbers of landmine/UXO clearance operations, which focused on the heavily contaminated provinces in the South and in the border areas of the nation to clear the land to support returning of the displaced people and

economic activities of the affected communities. These efforts have resulted in hundreds of hectares of cultivated land cleared, making a great contribution to the socio-economic development of the country. Engineering Command/Ministry of Defence of Vietnam is carrying out the Vietnam landmine/UXO impact assessment and technical survey project as well as with conducting clearance programs to reserve thousands of infrastructure construction projects of all levels. It is estimated that the clearance activities have only covered around 7-8% contaminated area with about 15-20% left over landmines/UXO cleared. The demining forces in Vietnam are functioning mainly under the control and management of Engineering Command and organized from the central to local levels, including management and supervising bodies and demining units. The deminers are provided with adequate training, technical equipment and have good practical experience with an application of manual-based working procedures. Mechanical clearance has been applied in some regions but the results have been limited due to varied terrain, difficulty in transportation and high cost.

The Government of Vietnam has also paid an adequate attention to mine victim assistance and awareness education. Every year, tens of million US dollars has been invested in giving first aid, medical treatment, victim assistance, setting up centres for physical rehabilitation, vocational training and job creation as well as launching the mine risk awareness education programs through national mass media. The mine awareness education activities have been provided in heavily contaminated regions in the Central and the South in various forms such as documentaries broadcasted on TV, extra-curricular activities in schools, photo or information exhibitions aimed at helping people be aware of the mine prevention measures and first aid skills in mine incidents. Since Vietnam is still a low income country, available resources for these tasks are quite limited.

Vietnam has been an active member of international mine action community and is strengthening its cooperation and coordination with other countries in this regard. The support for our mine action activities from the UN, the governments of the USA, Japan, Australia, EU as well as non-governmental organizations and international donors, etc., have greatly helped enhance the available resources regarding finance, equipment and experience for clearance, medical treatment, community-based mine awareness education and victim assistance programs in our country.

We are now facing 5 main challenges upon mine clearance operations in Vietnam:

1. Contaminated land in Vietnam stretches over a very large area of 60,000 km² with estimated 350,000-500,000 tons of landmine/UXO. Provided with current clearance speed, the completion of the affected area could be done only by the year of 2070.

2. Both manual and mechanical clearance operations face grave difficulties due to varied terrain and heavy vegetation, changes in location and depth of landmine/UXO because of natural phenomena such as flood and erosion, as well as backward infrastructure system such as roads, etc.
3. Landmine/UXO left after the wars in Vietnam come in a variety of types including chemical and toxic ones and was made by different countries. Particularly, due to impacts of tropical climate, metal parts of these ordnances are usually quickly eroded thus making them increasingly dangerous.
4. Clearance is extremely expensive. It is estimated that 10 billion USD are required to clear all the mines and UXO in Vietnam and yet it does not include the expenditures for mine awareness education and victim and affected community assistance.
5. Industries of the country remain underdeveloped, limiting the resources for maintenance and service of manual and mechanical demining equipment as well as the supporting machineries as vehicles and communication means.

To overcome these challenges, the Government and Ministry of Defence of Vietnam are jointly setting up an integrated strategic plan including the following major objectives:

1. To promptly complete the Vietnam landmine/UXO impact assessment and technical survey project which is expected to be the basis to set mine action priorities for each region that is subordinate to the integrated socio-development strategy of the country as the whole.
2. To expand universal mine awareness education programs to minimize mine incidents and enhance mine victim assistance projects in affected communities in terms of medical care, education system and economic development.
3. To establish and build up EOD teams of both Engineering Command and provincial district levels, at the same time, to provide community-based specific training and education with a view to mobilizing and encouraging the involvement of the entire people in national mine action programs.
4. To strengthen international cooperation relations to call for assistance from donors regarding technical equipment, technology and proved experience, at the same time, to continuously improve domestic scientific and technological development research in the field of landmine/UXO clearance. To train and build up the contingent of qualified mine action policy-maker and manager of all levels.
5. To establish and develop national mine action database in service for operational planning and timely response.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although war has ended in Vietnam for nearly 30 years, our people are day by day still coped with the deadly threat of the landmine/UXO and suffer the hardships and miseries caused by their presences. The Government of Vietnam has done its utmost to eradicate this disaster, but much remains to be done. For the last years, international governments and donors, the UN and other NGOs have played an important role and made a great contribution to the outcomes of mine action operations in our country. We would like to express our sincere thanks for this cooperation and wish to continue securing further assistance from international mine action community that enables Vietnam to achieve the goals set in our mine action strategy.

Thank you for your attention.