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Country Profile: Thailand

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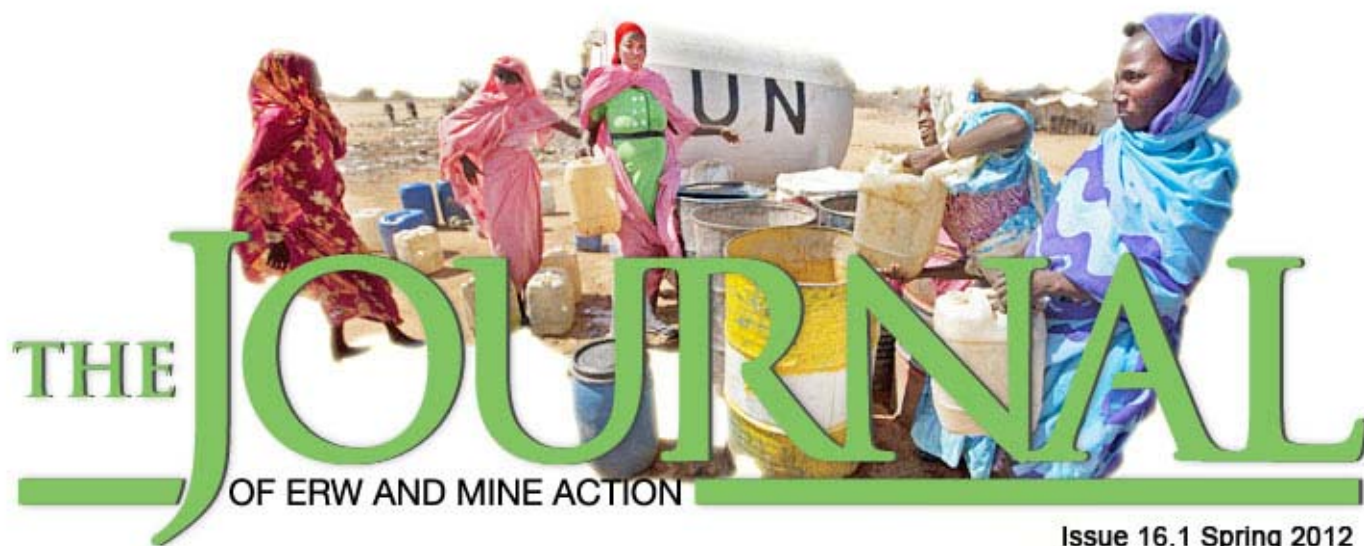
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Country Profile: Thailand

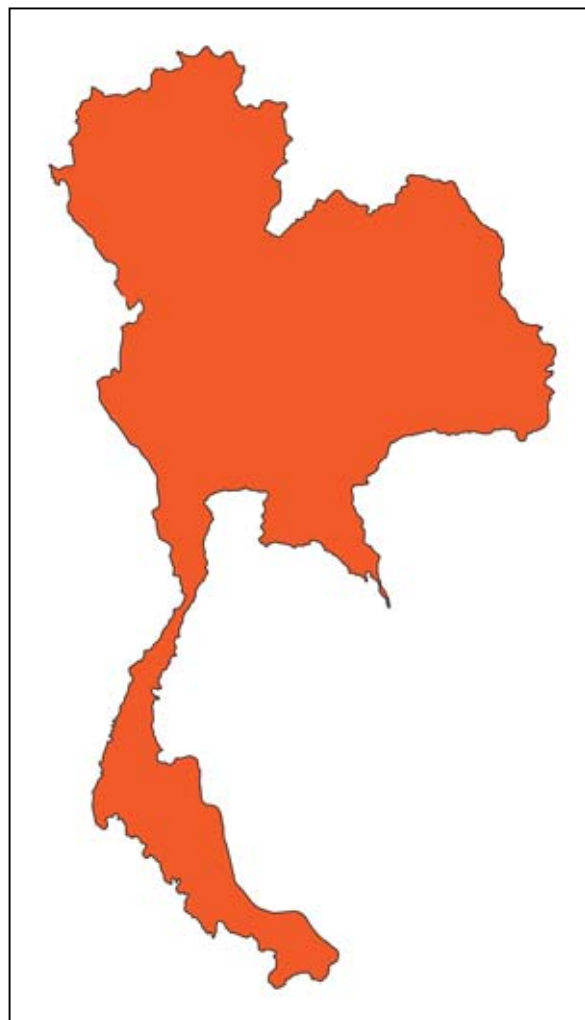
In May 1999, Thailand became a State Party to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, or APMBBC). Thailand continues to work toward passing an executive measure to incorporate its provisions into national law. Thailand states that it has never produced or exported anti-personnel mines, and that it completed the destruction of 337,725 stockpiled mines on 24 April 2003. However, a Thai civilian was convicted of laying AP mines along the border from 2008 to 2010.

Though Thailand participated in the diplomatic conferences of the Oslo Process, which created the *Convention on Cluster Munitions*, and acted as an observer throughout the formal negotiations, it did not sign the convention when it was open for signature in Oslo in 2008.¹

Contamination and Clearance

Thailand is affected by landmines, explosive remnants of war, abandoned explosive ordnance and unexploded ordnance as a result of conflicts along its borders with Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar (Burma). Most recently, in February 2011, Thailand was the subject of international criticism when its military was accused of firing artillery cluster munitions into Cambodia during fighting connected with an ongoing border dispute.

The Thai Civilian Deminers Association conducted a Technical Survey in 2010 and found that unexploded submunitions contaminate an estimated 315,000 square meters (78 acres) in the Fakta district of the northern Uttaradit province along the border with Laos. Dropped by U.S. aircraft during the Vietnam War², these submunitions now contaminate the remote forested area. No known casualties were reported; however, the Thai Civilian Deminers Association notes that the contaminated area "limits villagers' access to the forest, grazing for livestock, farming and recreation."¹ The Thai-Cambodian border is also known to be contaminated with other unexploded ordnance, such



as mortar shells and caches of abandoned mortar and rocket-propelled grenades, left over from shelling between Vietnamese and Cambodian Government forces during the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1975–1979).¹

Although no clearance activities were reported in 2010, Thailand Mine Action Center's Humanitarian Mine Action Unit 4 cleared 56,816 square meters (14 acres) in the Pooh Nong Sam Yai area of Uttaradit in 2011.¹

Conflict With Cambodia

In 2008, two Thai soldiers were injured when they stepped on landmines. Thailand claimed that Cambodian forces laid these mines, but Cambodia stated that the mines existed from previous conflicts. In 2009, another Thai soldier was reported wounded when he stepped on a landmine in the same location. Then, in February 2010, a Thai civilian pled guilty to laying landmines on the Cambodian border and was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Cambodian government.¹

In early February 2011, border clashes turned violent, and after both sides had exchanged fire, Thai soldiers fired artillery cluster munitions into Cambodia.³ The root of this conflict involves disputed claims over the 10th century Preah Vihear temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Following the incident, Thailand denied cluster-munition use. Cluster Munition Coalition members traveled to Cambodia in February and April 2011 to observe evidence of unexploded submunitions. Similarly, the Norwegian People's Aid program office in Cambodia also observed unexploded submunitions during a trip to the area. In light of the physical evidence, the CMC issued a press statement confirming that the Thai military fired cluster munitions into Cambodian territory. The Cambodian Mine Action Center reported that at least 10 people were killed, including civilians.³ Austria, Laos, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom publicly condemned Thailand's actions.¹ As a result of these developments, Thailand expressed the intent to join the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* in a statement at the intercessional meeting in Geneva in June 2011.¹

Role of International Organizations

Several international organizations provide clearance and humanitarian aid in Thailand. The most prominent and active humanitarian demining group is Norwegian People's Aid, which has been in Thailand since 2000. NPA collaborates with the Thai Government, TMAC and Thailand Civilian Deminers Association to assist in clearance activities. NPA seeks to help Thailand meet the obligations of the APMBBC and to improve technical survey as well as information management.⁵

Other humanitarian nongovernmental organizations also provide risk education and additional services in Thailand. The Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees and TMAC provide risk-education programs. The Jesuit Refugee Service assists mine and explosive remnants of war survivors as well as survivors' families. Assistance programs include education, support for children of survivors and emergency humanitarian aid in the forms of food, clothing and basic necessities.¹

Conclusion

While cluster munitions are not a widespread problem in Thailand, the isolated incident along the Cambodian border shows that the Thai military still possesses the capability to use them. Conversely, the work of international organizations in Thailand along with Thailand's expressed interest in joining the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* show that things may change. ↗

~ Ivy Hensley, CISR staff

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1. "Thailand Country Profile." *Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor 2010*. http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/386. Accessed 24 January 2012.
2. The Vietnamese call this the American War.
3. Sakada, Chun. "CMAC Investigating Cluster Munition Site." *Voice of America*. 9 February 2011. <http://www.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/CMAC-Investigating-Cluster-Munition-Site-115634654.html>. Accessed 27 September 2011.
4. Johansen, Tine. "Norwegian People's Aid condemns the use of cluster munitions." *Norwegian People's Aid*. 4 July 2011. http://www.npaid.org/en/News_Archive/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=17139. Accessed 27 September 2011.
5. NPA Thailand Newsletter: 25 May 2011. *Norwegian People's Aid*. <http://www.npaid.org/filestore/ThailandMayNewsletter.pdf>. Accessed 27 September 2011.



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