



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**28 March 2007**

### **Support Landmine Action Week to rid the world of Landmines**

Landmine Action Week (LAW) is a joint initiative of Austcare and the Australian Network to Ban Landmines (ANBL) and supports the United Nations' International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, 4 April 2007. LAW aims to raise awareness of landmine issues, to acknowledge and promote Australia's commitment to landmine action, and to raise funds to continue to assist people affected by landmines in developing countries.

The Australian public has made a significant contribution to global achievements under 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, covering the destruction of stockpiles, landmine clearance, educating communities at risk and assistance to landmine survivors. However, much remains to be done to clear mine affected areas and support survivors of this deadly legacy of war in developing countries, especially in our region.

"We commend the Australian Government for the \$15 million a year it contributes to clearing mines, helping victims of landmines and encouraging all countries to join the ban on landmines. We need the Australian public to make their own contribution to these efforts and we need pressure on countries like the US, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to join the 155 countries that are part of the treaty banning anti-personnel landmines", said Dr Mark Zirnsak, National Coordinator of the Australian Network to Ban Landmines.

"There are around half a million people around the world who have survived a landmine accident – and most of them live in poorer countries," says Michael Milton, Austcare Ambassador for People with Disabilities. "We need to ensure survivors not lucky enough to be in a country like Australia, receive the support they need to live in dignity and enjoy their basic rights."

#### **Background facts**

Landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) have devastating humanitarian impacts on civilian communities, both during and after conflict. Landmines and ERW cause death and injury to people who are simply attempting to carry out daily activities. Mine contamination prevents communities from accessing water sources, health care, education, and other vital resources, and results in the isolation of communities by inhibiting movement and preventing post-conflict reconstruction.

Eighty-two countries are currently contaminated by landmines and ERW. The worst affected countries include Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Eritrea, Iraq, Lao PDR, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan.

Each year, thousands of people are injured or die as a result of landmines and unexploded ordnance. The injuries sustained by mine accidents are severe, and include destroyed limbs, shrapnel wounds, blindness and burns. Today, approximately 500,000 people around the world have survived a landmine accident. Providing assistance to survivors in developing countries remains an ongoing challenge.

Despite the global work being undertaken to rid the world of landmines, there remains much work to be done. While Cambodia saw the number of victims in 2006 almost halve, this does not represent the global trend. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2006*, while demining activities are at their highest ever rate of productivity, there were 11 percent more casualties in 2005 than in 2004. This was essentially a result of intensified conflict in countries such as Burma, India, Nepal and Pakistan. More than 80 percent of casualties were civilians.

More international effort is needed to stop both State and Non-State Actors from producing, stockpiling, transferring and using these weapons. Austcare and ANBL support Australia's ongoing efforts to universalise the Convention, especially in our region.

### **Austcare Landmine Action Week Events**

Launch at Martin Place, Sydney – 7:00am to 9:00am, Wednesday April 4, 2007

Austcare's Ambassador, Michael Milton (Australia's Fastest Skier) will challenge the public to experience a mock landmine zone and compete in an obstacle course as part of the launch of Landmine Action Week and the "*Playing Fields Not Minefields*" campaign 2007. The launch aims to alert the public about what it means to live in a mine affected zone and raise funds to clear an area the size of Martin Place from the threat of landmines.

The general public, school and corporate teams will be competing, with prizes donated by Darrell Lea. Young dancers from the Cambodian and Peruvian Australian communities and musicians will entertain the public, along with young sporting groups demonstrating their sport on a cleared minefield. Fresh hot cross buns and coffee (generously donated by Tip Top, Café Express and Di Lorenzo) will be available for the public with all proceeds going to Austcare's Mine Action program.

Throughout the week corporate and community groups have been invited to run "*Playing Fields Not Minefields*" activities and a Hot Cross Bun Morning Tea to raise funds and awareness. Information on other Austcare events, including a Cocktail Reception with *The Glasshouse's* Corinne Grant as MC at Sydney's Westin, is at [www.austcare.org.au](http://www.austcare.org.au)

### **ANBL Landmine Action Week Events**

"A Path is Made by Walking It", will be launched at Hobart Bookshop, Salamanca Square, Hobart - Wednesday 4 April 5:30pm. This collection of reflections on the work of the Australian Network to Ban Landmine within the international movement to ban anti-personnel landmines will be launched by Margaret Reynolds and will be available for purchase at the venue.

Opening night of "Deadly Legacy - a photographic exhibition of the effects of anti-vehicle mines and cluster munitions". Bairnsdale Uniting Church, corner Lanes Rd and Omeo Hwy, Friday 30 March at 7:30pm. The exhibition will be open from 10:00am -12:00pm, 2 - 20 April.

School students will come together at Chisholm College, Perth on Friday 30 March for a forum on the continuing disaster landmines cause throughout the world. Following this

day, all passing through Wesley Church Corner, corner of Hay and William, Perth, will have the opportunity to sing petitions and get involved in the international campaign to rid the world of these weapons.

**ENDS**

**Media please note** - further information/visuals, or interviews:

**Austcare:**

(Interviews with Archie Law, Austcare a/g CEO, or Austcare Ambassador Michael Milton)

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