



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**5 January 2007**

### **Austcare welcomes Australia's position on the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention and calls for international action on cluster munitions**

Austcare applauds the Australian Government's ratification of Protocol V on explosive remnants of war (ERW) to the Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Convention on 29 December 2006.

Protocol V recognises that serious post-conflict humanitarian problems are caused by ERW, including cluster munitions, and aims to prevent or at least reduce the unacceptable effects of these weapons on the civilian community. The inclusion of Protocol V in the Convention is a crucial step in developing a body of international law that minimises the humanitarian impact of conventional weapons, both during and after conflict. The Australian Government's initiative in signing Protocol V is an important step in further regulating or prohibiting the use of such weapons, and mirrors the good work being achieved to eliminate anti-personnel landmines under the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention) to which Australia is an original signatory.

Austcare is committed to eliminate landmines and ERW, thereby reducing poverty. Austcare believes more international effort is required to reduce the risk from ERW. "We call for a total ban on the production, stockpiling and use of cluster munitions, such as those which have killed and maimed innocent civilians in Lebanon," says Major General Michael Smith AO (Retd), Austcare CEO.

While it is estimated that since the recent conflict over 1 million cluster bomblets remain on the ground in southern Lebanon, other countries suffer a similar tragic legacy. Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Serbia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia have witnessed equally tragic civilian casualties from cluster bomblets. Lao PDR was subjected to intense aerial bombardments over 1964-1975. The resulting bomblets have caused over 40% of all deaths from unexploded ordnance (UXO). Four decades on, an average one person is still killed or injured daily in Lao PDR by UXO.

Today, there are billions of submunitions in the arsenals of more than 70 nations, as well as in the hands of non-state armed groups, posing a real threat of proliferation. Cluster munitions produce large amounts of ERW and needlessly endanger civilians long after fighting has ceased. A recent report by Handicap International revealed that 98 percent of victims of cluster bombs over the past thirty years have been civilians, a third of them children. Austcare calls on all States Parties to the CCW Convention to now focus their attention on cluster munitions, the conventional weapon system most in need of international regulation.

"The Australian Government's ratification of Protocol V is commendable," says Major General Michael Smith. "It demonstrates the nexus between conflict and poverty, and the significant impact cluster munitions can have in undermining basic human security."

## **ENDS**

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