

**The Australian Institute for International Affairs (NSW) presents:**

**Major General Michael G. Smith AO (Retd)**

**“Simple Solutions in a Complex World: Ending the Legacy of  
Landmines Once and For All”**

**Monday, May 30, 2005**

**Introduction**

I am delighted to be here on the occasion of Landmine Action Week 2005, and particularly as a member of AIIA.

AUSTCARE was established in 1967 in response to the growing problem of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). We are now one of the few remaining all-Australian non-sectarian NGOs. AUSTCARE’s mission is *to assist refugees overseas, displaced people and those affected by landmines to rebuild their lives through the expert delivery of development programs in partnership with local communities and other agencies*. Our simple mission statement reflects the complexity of the work we do. Our mandate includes emergency humanitarian assistance as well as long-term development and rehabilitation projects. **AUSTCARE’s business is to save lives by assisting the most vulnerable people in the world, and we have worked successfully in more than 30 countries since 1967.** Right now we are implementing 18 different projects in 10 countries throughout Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and closer to home in the Asia Pacific region. AUSTCARE is doing something about the terrible situation of refugees, IDPs, and those affected by landmines, issues from which Australia is no longer removed in an increasingly globalised world.

- More than 40 million refugees and IDPs.
- At last count, 84 mine-affected countries, many of them among the poorest nations on earth.

These people are the unfortunate victims of conflict and natural disaster. They represent the “poorest of the poor,” in a world of six billion people where half are now living below the poverty line of US\$2 per day, with half that number again living on less than US\$1 per day. In seeking to provide emergency humanitarian assistance, as well as long-term development and rehabilitation projects, AUSTCARE is confronted by difficult issues that

transcend national borders and impacts on the communities with which we work

### **Landmine Action Week**

Last year, in collaboration with the Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL-AN), AUSTCARE initiated Australia's first annual Landmine Action Week (LAW) to raise awareness among Australians to the tragedy of landmines and unexploded ordnance (or remnants of war). LAW provides an opportunity to celebrate Australia's contribution to landmine action and to recall the continuing legacy of landmines in affected countries. We have started modestly to grow the awareness of Australians to landmines over the past two years, and if we can attract sufficient sponsorship we hope to grow this in future years.

### **Landmines – An Overview**

Most of you probably have some basic understanding of landmines and their impact.

- Landmines cause death and injury to 15-20,000 people each year, 90% of whom are civilians, and many of whom are children.
- About 50% of landmine casualties die before reaching a hospital.
- During the course of this presentation we can expect at least another three innocent victims to have been killed or maimed.
- The presence of landmines disrupts the lives of millions of others.
- There are around 300,000 landmine survivor amputees living in developing countries, most without adequate welfare support.
- It costs about \$3-\$30 to produce a landmine; and about \$300 -\$1,000 to remove the same item.
- There are still around 15 countries that continue to produce antipersonnel landmines, despite the fact that they have been banned under the Ottawa Treaty.
- More than 140 countries have signed and are adhering to the treaty to ban landmines. The US, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Israel are among those who have not signed and ratified the Treaty.

Landmines exacerbate problems of displacement and repatriation because their presence blocks access to vital roads and infrastructure, prevents people from returning home once a conflict has ended, and compromises their safety in situations where they are forced to live in landmine affected

communities. Where landmines exist, productivity and progress is stifled, and poverty is fuelled.

This is the bad news: the good news is that the fight against landmines is being won. In the murky world of arms control, the abolition and clearance of landmines stands as a beacon of success.

Tonight, I want to take you on a journey beyond the immediate impact of landmines. I am going to highlight the durable solutions that landmine action is providing to enhance peacebuilding and human security. I'd like to suggest that landmine action is a springboard towards addressing some of the world's more daunting social issues and, in fact, an example of how the simple act of removing a landmine from the ground is contributing to a culture of peace on a much broader level.

I have three key messages in relation to landmine action:

- 1.) **Globalisation and Interdependence.** Organisations working in the international sector today encounter a complex array of social, economic, and political factors that must be taken into account to tackle the root causes of humanitarian and long-term development problems. It is now well recognised that we will never achieve a safer and more prosperous world for the millions of people living below the poverty line if we do not adopt a more integrated approach with our interventions. This, I believe, has been articulated very clearly in the Millennium Development Goals.
- 2.) **Landmine Action as a Model for Sustainable Development.** Landmine Action pioneered an integrated approach in humanitarian interventions that has led to more efficient outcomes for those people living in landmine affected communities. This involves simple but inter-related activities that translate landmine clearance initiatives into reduced poverty and improved living standards for some of the world's most vulnerable people. This approach has also led to a better understanding of the peacebuilding process.
- 3.) **Australia's Role in Landmine Action.** We cannot shy away from the broad range of complex issues facing our world today. We must instead seek innovative ways to tackle the more difficult issues using practical, in fact *simple*, models that bring us closer to communities

abroad and which acknowledge Australia's growing leadership role in the region. Landmine action is one such "lightening rod" into the realities faced by communities recovering from conflict. It is also an area where Australians have played a significant leadership role in the past 10 years. There is still so much more to be done. We need to recall and continue Australia's important role in the sector and continue our commitment.

### **Globalisation and Interdependence**

The social, political, and economic dynamics of conflict and reconstruction require us to consider broader issues because we now know that re-building communities and promoting a culture of peace requires us to address the *root* causes of conflict and social injustice.

The reality of poverty and social injustice, and their direct connection with conflict, is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and a range of international conventions that protect human rights and guide AUSTCARE's work. This legal framework guides our commitment to rights-based programming, which shifts the focus of our work from merely looking at the *needs* of people, to our *duty* and *responsibility* to respect, protect, and fulfil their human rights. This approach reflects our growing understanding that human security is not merely a question of fixing a stand-alone problem and considering the job done, but rather a much more delicate process of identifying root causes of the problem, and seeking durable solutions for the affected populations. This is why AUSTCARE places so much emphasis on partnering with local communities, local NGOs, and local government departments to develop local capacity and achieve sustainable development at the grassroots.

### **Integrated Mine Action**

Our work in landmine action has assisted us in our integrated approach to reconstruction and development. While we are still learning how humanitarian efforts interact with conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, landmine action provides an ideal case for how simple but inter-related steps can result in long-term solutions to broader reconstruction and development problems. This integrated approach addresses not just landmine clearance, but a range of issues tied to the root cause of the landmine problem and sources of healing and community building once the physical threat of

landmines has been removed. In this sense, landmine action acts as a platform for broader reforms at the individual, community, national, and regional levels, as well as to act as a springboard into the more delicate work of peacebuilding.

The principle of landmine action is to reduce the scope and threat of the landmine problem through five distinct but integrated pillars. These are:

- landmine clearance,
- victim assistance,
- landmine risk reduction education,
- advocacy to support a total ban on landmines, and
- stockpile destruction.

This integrated approach highlights the fundamental difference between humanitarian and military landmine clearance. Humanitarian clearance is measured by the limbs and lives of ordinary people, which means that the clearance standard has to guarantee the safety of the people living in the cleared area. Military clearance is focused on clearing narrow paths to allow military personnel to access an area to achieve military objectives.

But the concept of Integrated Mine Action expands beyond humanitarian mine clearance and the five pillars of landmine action. It is not simply based on its distinction from military techniques. On a much more sophisticated level, it acknowledges the fact that landmine action is not a stand alone sector but rather a holistic approach centred on the community's needs and capabilities to facilitate community ownership and empowerment, and to provide them with appropriate resources for their resettlement on cleared land. Such resources include infrastructure support, strengthening agriculture, the introduction of alternative food security, supply of water and sanitation, the provision of victim assistance and legal support structures.

AUSTCARE has an integrated mine action project in Cambodia that is partly funded by AusAID, as part of the Australian Government's commitment to mine action. One of the main problems affecting the development of Cambodia is landmines. It is one of the most mine-affected countries in the world and AUSTCARE is working in two of the most contaminated provinces. More than 800 people every year are still victims of mines and unexploded ordnance accidents in Cambodia. Most accidents happen while people are travelling, cutting or collecting wood, farming, or other activities they must do in order to survive. Safe land is scarce, the

pressure on the land is high and people are pushed to continue risky behaviour because their option is starvation. The pressure brought to bear by landmines on community lifestyles aggravates their ability to recover from a long history of conflict, including psychological rehabilitation and creating a culture of peace that can be sustained well into the future.

For the past four years, AUSTCARE has been supporting mine clearance activities tied to a range of development inputs, including resources and support for people to maximize the use of the land through building of wells, schools, roads, and dykes. Through this work, we have not only witnessed the opening of vast tracts of useful land but what were once minefields are now home to numerous families who are growing fruit trees and vegetables on their garden plots. AUSTCARE has supported the building of schools and has conducted sustainable agriculture projects on mine-free land. In our next round of projects in Cambodia we will incorporate micro finance schemes to assist further in helping regenerate the local economy. Most importantly, people feel safe again as the threat of landmines in cleared areas is removed. Landmine related casualties have been drastically reduced.

- Provide some personal observations.

AUSTCARE's experience in Cambodia's has been extended to other mine affected countries worldwide – we have undertaken projects in Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan, and Bosnia by helping communities to recover from conflict. In Mozambique, AUSTCARE's mine action project has transformed one area that was deserted because of landmine contamination into a source of food security for a large town population. We then concentrated our efforts on improving nutrition and education standards – both of which are related. In Bosnia, we were instrumental in assisting Norwegian Peoples Aid to create one of the best mine dog schools in the world. In Afghanistan and Angola we have funded landmine clearance projects as a component of broader development schemes.

In all these locations our work in landmine action has helped improve civic engagement through project ownership - a critical component in building a culture of peace.

I have seen first hand that the primary need for people living in conflict affected areas is to survive. They will do what they have to do to get food and support their families, even if it requires putting themselves at risk. I

cannot emphasize enough the strong linkage between mine contamination and crippling poverty. For example, in the case of Laos, what is striking is that the map showing the location of unexploded bombs and landmines is exactly the same as the provinces shown to suffer from the highest rate of poverty – and we're talking here about a country rated one of the very poorest in the world. What integrated mine action provides is not just a solution to the immediate security risk of landmines, but an opportunity to take the next step and build sustainable futures for people who have unfortunately learned to live with next to nothing.

The experience of integrated mine action draws on my previous career in the Australian Army. In East Timor I served as the first Deputy Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force from December 1999 to March 2001. The lessons of peacekeeping that I derived from this and my other experiences in Kashmir, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia, where I also served, have helped guide my leadership as CEO of AUSTCARE. This is because there is a close relationship between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. Poverty is evident in all these situations, and most often refugees, IDPs, and victims of landmines are present. People stand at the centre of all these issues, for they are the civilian non-combatants who become the legacy of conflict.

Landmines are active reminders of conflict, and by helping to remove or control them, landmine action plays an important role in peacebuilding. In as much as they are a reminder of war, landmines can also play a role in the peace implementation process. In Afghanistan, for example, community-based demining has been linked to the demobilisation of soldiers and has, as a result, provided a path to reintegration both in economic and social terms. Landmine action directly fosters the restoration of peace, and through related development inputs it strengthens community and national stability. All of these factors create the necessary pre-conditions for peace, not least by resettling populations and reducing poverty levels. In this way the simple act of removing one landmine from the ground establishes a first critical commitment towards a culture of peace.

### **Australia's Role**

Australia has played – and must continue to play – an important role in landmine action. The challenge for NGOs like AUSTCARE is to retain a strong sectoral identity, while at the same time integrating landmine action within our broader humanitarian and development interventions.

The importance of landmine action is especially relevant in the Asia-Pacific region, which contains the vast majority of countries not complying with the global ban on anti-personnel landmines. It is also the region with a very high number of landmine affected countries and with a correspondingly high percentage of non-state actors – armed groups operating outside of government control - using landmines.

A critical factor for the success in landmine action throughout the Asia-Pacific will be the continuing commitment of donor governments such as Australia. Australia's leadership in the region has been significant over the past 10 years. The Government committed A\$100 million for landmine action from 1995-2005 and has exceeded its commitment within this timeframe. I was recently in Nairobi, Kenya, for the review of the Treaty Banning Anti-Personnel Landmines, where Australia's Parliamentary Secretary and Special Representative for Landmine Action, Mr. Bruce Billson, stated the Government's intention to continue its commitment to landmine action over the next five years. Although no specific financial commitment has yet been made for the coming five years, we expect that the Government will continue to support landmine action activities as strongly as in the past. And, indeed, it should. A quick look at the issues facing the region, and one can easily identify the importance of landmine action in contributing to stability, peace, and development in mine affected countries. Australia's efforts in the region can only be strengthened by an ongoing commitment to this issue.

The movement to ban landmines and conduct landmine action grew from a number of international NGOs, and the campaign has been successfully brought to the attention of member States by the ICBL. Civil society still has a continuing responsibility to hold governments accountable to their commitment to landmine action. Australians themselves have been at the forefront of some of the most successful landmine projects implemented. Australian deminers are some of the best in the world. And many Australians are deeply committed to the sector.

### **Conclusion**

Everyday AUSTCARE engages in landmine affected countries, with people devastated by the legacy of war. Our involvement is a by product of resettling refugees and internally displaced people. Our commitment is real and our results are easy to measure. There is so much more to be done, and

there is no question that Australia has an important future contribution to make. The essence of landmine action is its simplicity and its enduring widespread impact on the livelihood of peoples.

It is time for us to end the legacy of landmines once and for all. This is a campaign that we are winning, and I hope that you will encourage our government to maintain its focus and its commitment, and that you will support AUSTCARE in our endeavours.

Thank you.