



MEDIA RELEASE

Austcare Calls for Australian Leadership to Ban Clusters

Austcare, one of Australia's leading authorities on landmines and an active campaigner on cluster munitions, is disappointed by the Federal Government's decision to buy this type of weapon.

The Department of Defence has announced it is spending \$14 million dollars acquiring the 'SMArt 155' anti-tank artillery round and could begin taking deliveries before the end of this year.

Austcare is part of a large international coalition committed to banning cluster munitions from the world's arsenals because of their devastating effect on innocent civilians.

The formal definition of a cluster munition is currently being worked on and could include the 'SMArt 155'.

"The Australian Government has pledged to be a leader in ridding the world of cluster munitions and should therefore not be acquiring these until a precise definition has been developed, which could be as early as May next year," says Austcare CEO Major-General Michael Smith (Ret'd).

Only two weeks ago the Federal Government announced Australia will play a leading role in the negotiation of an international agreement to ban cluster munitions, in the face of growing outrage over their impact.

The use of cluster munitions has devastated communities throughout the world. Unexploded bomblets can remain on the ground for years and have killed or maimed thousands of innocent men, women and children. They contaminate land and in doing so hinder the recovery from conflict, the development of affected communities and constrain human security.

While the Department of Defence maintains its new weapon-type is not a "cluster munition", this is disputed by large sections of the international community.

"It is disappointing that the Australian government has ignored our call for a moratorium," says Michael Smith.

Austcare is unaware of any independent information available to verify the government's claims about the accuracy and reliability of this weapon.
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Austcare CEO, Mike Smith, is available for further interviews.

Austcare's Position Statement on cluster munitions is at <http://www.austcare.org.au/get-involved/campaigns.aspx> and images of cluster munition victims are available upon request.

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