



Speaking notes

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Parliamentary Secretary for International Development  
Assistance

**International launch of the new Mine Action Strategy for the  
Australian aid program 2010-14**

Cartagena

Colombia

3 December 2009

**(Check Against Delivery)**

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Thank you for attending the international launch of the new Mine Action Strategy for the Australian aid program for 2010 to 2014.

The strategy was officially launched in Canberra by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, on 18 November 2009.

Holding the international launch of the strategy in Cartagena, so far from Australia, reminds us that landmines and other explosive remnants of war touch every part of our world.

The Australian Government has recently expressed its desire to broaden, deepen and strengthen its relationship with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean – bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally.

Over coming months, Australia will consider an expansion in development assistance to the region.

While Australia has been spared of the scourge of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war, several countries in our own immediate region are directly affected – Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka are just a few examples.

The damage caused by a single landmine or explosive remnant of war is bad enough – but where there is widespread contamination – we know the social and economic impacts are devastating.

Since Australia signed the Mine Ban Convention in 1997, we have advocated strongly for countries to participate in this instrument, particularly in the Asia–Pacific region, which remains underrepresented in membership of the Convention.

To date we have provided more than \$175 million for mine action in 16 countries – most prominently in the Asia Pacific region but also in Africa and the Middle East.

Australia has also been a strong supporter of efforts to expand the international legal framework for mine action.

We were one of the original signatories to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in December 2008 – which was a significant humanitarian achievement – and are taking the necessary steps towards ratification as soon as possible.

And, we are a strong supporter of the Protocol on explosive remnants of war under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Australia also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2008.

Our mine action assistance has helped thousands of people, directly and indirectly, to recover from the trauma of injuries caused by landmines and cluster munitions and rebuild their lives.

We have promoted integrated approaches to our assistance, particularly in Cambodia and Laos – incorporating mine action activities into broader development programs.

This has enabled us to reduce the impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war, while contributing to sustainable economic and social development outcomes.

We have also responded to emerging humanitarian needs in conflict and post-conflict situations. Our mine action support in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon, for example, has helped to create a secure environment for humanitarian operations and early recovery.

Australia's new mine action strategy will enable us to build on these achievements, and at the same time meet our international commitments on disability and cluster munitions.

We recognise the complexity of the task ahead and will be allocating \$100 million over five years to implement the strategy.

The strategy has one overriding goal – to reduce the threat and socioeconomic impact of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

In reaching this goal, we want to achieve four specific things.

The first is to help achieve a better quality of life for the victims of landmines, their affected families and the communities.

It is a tragedy to be injured by a landmine or a cluster munition without also having to cope with a loss of livelihood, loss of income and loss of sense of self-worth.

Australia will support access by victims to appropriate medical care, physical and sensory rehabilitation, psychosocial support, education and skills training and income-earning opportunities.

We will also encourage and assist partner governments to integrate assistance for victims into national policy frameworks on healthcare, social services and disability.

Our second objective is to achieve a reduction in the number of deaths and injuries by removing landmines and other explosive remnants of war. This is a difficult task and several countries are behind in meeting their clearance targets.

Australia can help communities become involved in mine clearance and land use. We can also assist with solving technical challenges and delivering mine risk education. All such projects contribute to reducing the terrible toll these weapons inflict on innocent civilians.

Our third objective is to build capacity.

Because primary responsibility for mine action rests with affected states it is up to them to clear all mines and other explosive remnants of war. Doing this quickly enough to meet targets is challenging for many poor countries.

Australia can work with mine-affected States to build the technical and managerial skills of those involved in mine clearance and land release, including having enhanced monitoring and evaluation.

The fourth objective outlined in the strategy is to continue Australia's strong and proactive leadership towards eliminating land mines and cluster munitions.

We will support the efforts of our partners to advocate for universal adherence to the international mine action conventions as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Distinguished delegates

Over the past two years, disability has become a key feature of Australia's aid program.

People with disability in developing countries are among the poorest of the poor and unless much more effort is made, they are likely to remain that way.

Through our aid program, Australia is now working with partner governments and organisations to raise the profile of people with disability so that they have the same opportunities in life as everyone else and benefit from the gains of development.

We want to see all children receive an education, that adults with disability receive education and training and that people can physically access public buildings.

And we want people with disability to be powerful champions of their own cause.

Australia's mine action strategy will accommodate our increased emphasis on the needs of victims and people with disability.

It will also help ensure that survivors of landmines and other explosive remnants of war enjoy access to assistance on a non-discriminatory basis as other people with disabilities.

The strategy will be implemented with and by a wide range of partners – from governments, the private sector and civil society.

But most of all we want to team up with organisations representing the victims of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

They are the experts. They know what their needs are and the best ways of meeting them. We will listen to them.

If we want to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, we must increase the momentum on mine action.

Landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war undermine each of the MDGs.

They put productive land out of bounds and kill or maim livestock. They force children to leave school and girls to stay at home looking after injured after family members.

They kill children or make it hard for parents to travel to get health care, or safe water and they indirectly put women at greater risk of contracting diseases such as HIV.

The faster we eliminate these weapons, the better our chance of achieving the MDGs.

The new strategy clearly sets out the ways in which mine action can help achieve these goals.

Strong performance-based principles will also underpin the way Australia measures the effectiveness and impact of aid to mine action over the next five years.

The new strategy has a performance framework to guide and assess the implementation of Australia's mine action programs.

In addition, we will seek to involve victims and people with disability are involved in performance assessment processes and feedback mechanisms.

Distinguished delegates

Tomorrow, Australia looks forward to adopting the Cartagena Action Plan with the international community and thereby joining in the global commitment to mine action over the next five years.

In implementing our new strategy, Australia will work to achieve the outcomes agreed here in Colombia.

Australia is a significant supporter of mine action.

Our new Australian aid programme mine action strategy coupled with \$100 million pledge for 2010 to 2014 demonstrates our commitment to eliminate landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

Thank you.