



**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL STATEMENT  
TO THE FIFTH MEETING OF STATES  
PARTIES TO THE OTTAWA CONVENTION**

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**Delivered by**

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Madam President, I would like to start by congratulating Thailand for taking the initiative of hosting this meeting. It is the culmination of years of sustained effort by Thailand including the successful seminar hosted by Thailand last May in Bangkok. As the first formal meeting of the Ottawa Convention to take place in Asia, this meeting will highlight the significant landmine problems faced by many countries in this part of the world. I also want to congratulate Thailand for recently completing its stockpile destruction ahead of schedule.

It is important to acknowledge that good progress has been made. Almost 150 nations have now shown a commitment to the Convention by ratifying or signing it. In our region we congratulate Timor Leste for recently acceding. I am happy to read in the Landmine Monitor that donor funding had increased by 30% over last year. Good progress has also been made on the first concrete obligation of the Convention, stockpile destruction. I am encouraged that 18 countries have reported completing the destruction of their stockpiled anti-personnel mines this year.

However, we cannot afford to become complacent. I strongly urge non-member states to accede to the Convention as soon as possible and help eliminate the damage that these inhumane weapons inflict on more than 15,000 new victims each year.

Universalisation of the Convention is a primary goal for the Australian Government. Many states are not yet committed to banning landmines, including some leading members of the United Nations Security Council, most of the Middle East and much of Asia. Together, these nations continue to hold a combined total of more than 200 million anti-personnel mines. This is unacceptable.

My point, Madam President, is that while we can be proud of the successes achieved to date by all States and non-States Parties to the Convention, it is important to acknowledge that considerable work lies before us. Australia is seized of the tasks that remain, that is why we:

- continue to devote considerable financial resources to mine action mainly in this region,
- continue to take opportunities to encourage non states parties in the Asia-Pacific to join the Convention; and
- keep working to help implementation of the Convention for example through financial support for the Landmine Monitor and through the roles that we have played in the Stockpile Destruction and Victim Assistance Committees.

The Australian Government has expanded its financial assistance for mine action over the last year with more than A\$14.7 million spent on a range of humanitarian mine action programs, including A\$1.5 million to mine action activities in Iraq. This represents a 22.5% increase in funding over the 2001-2002 period. Australia has now provided more than A\$88 million to mine action activities and is well on track to providing the A\$100 million we pledged to mine action activities by December 2005.

This year Australia has continued to focus on mine action expenditure in our region. For example, in 2002-2003 we expended more than A\$5.4 million on mine action programs in Cambodia alone: on demining; education; victim assistance and other operations. We also provided more than A\$1 million for integrated mine action activities in Vietnam, as well as other programs in the region.

However, we have not focused solely on our region. Australia announced on 23 May 2003 that we will contribute A \$1.5 million to demining activities in Iraq through UNMAS. Of this amount, A\$1.2 million has enabled UNMAS to undertake a rapid assessment of mine and unexploded ordnance hazards. While A\$300,000 will enable the recruitment and placement of an Australian demining expert with the Mine Action Coordination Team. Elsewhere, Australia expended A\$2.5 million in Afghanistan and more than A\$1.4 million in Mozambique. Australia also contributed more than A\$1 million to other programs in the last year which included the Landmine Monitor and the 'Regional Mine Action Seminar' held in Cambodia.

From Thursday we will co-chair, with Croatia, the Committee on Victim Assistance. Under the able chairmanship of France and Colombia many states have taken the opportunity of providing detailed information on victim assistance. We encourage states parties that have not recently given updates to do so during our term so we will have a better picture of the problem we all face by next year's Review Conference. There are no easy solutions for mine victims, but it is clear that victim assistance requires help from donor countries and efforts by countries with victims to ensure that victims are not discriminated against and can find active employment. I commend Handicap International for its work in Asia over the past few years on helping governments in the region assist victims in a coordinated way and we look forward to the hearing their conclusions in final report of their work later this week.

This meeting will decide on the venue and time of the Convention's first Review Conference. We will be arguing for a reduction in meeting frequency. For example, States Parties Meetings might take place every

second year and Inter-sessional meetings once rather than twice a year. The Review Conference will also enable us to take stock of what still needs to be done.

Australia has strongly encouraged the notion of 'partnerships' in tackling mine action activities. The progress that has been made on landmine issues has only been accomplished through successful partnerships between affected countries, donors and NGOs.

Finally, let me conclude by re-iterating the need to encourage all countries to join the Convention. We will continue working to ensure that happens and to address humanitarian mine issues, in our own region and elsewhere.

Thank you Madam President