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International Campaign To Ban Landmines & Cluster Munitions Australian Network Incorporated.

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CLUSTER MUNITIONS MEETING CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Government delegations from 121 countries and hundreds of civil society representatives converged on Vientiane, Laos for the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Forty-six countries had ratified the Convention before the Meeting, becoming States Parties and agreeing to be bound by its conditions. On October 27, draft legislation had been introduced into the Australian Federal Parliament, but as we had not ratified the Convention, Australia's status at the Meeting was as an observer.

One extremely positive sign was that in addition to the States Parties and many signatory states, more than 30 countries which had not signed the Convention, including Russia, sent delegations.

The opening ceremony took place in the Cultural Hall on Tuesday 9 November. After being welcomed by the Lao Prime Minister we watched a film about the chaos and grief that cluster bombs had caused in the country. We were then treated to some cultural dancing including depictions of cluster bomb accidents. The mood was a combination of sombre reflection on the enormity of the problem and hope that great gains would be made during the week. Immediately following the conclusion of the ceremony we made our way to the first of the plenary sessions of the Meeting.

I had been accepted onto the Australian Government delegation so my time in Vientiane was busy, attending Government delegation briefings, liaising with the Government representatives and campaigners, and planning future campaign directions for the ANBLC.

During the week, campaigners from around the world gathered to lobby government delegates, plan future campaign actions and listen to stories of strength and courage from survivors of cluster bomb accidents. Australian representatives from different organizations gathered together a number of times to plan our response to the Australian draft legislation, something which is of paramount importance to us at this time. We are extremely lucky that a Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) campaigner, Bonnie Docherty, is a Professor of International Law at Harvard University. She and her students have provided us with discussion points to help us write submissions to tighten up our legislation.

On the Wednesday I was fortunate enough to be able to go on a field trip to Xieng Khouang province to see cluster munitions in the field, learn about land clearance and see demonstrations of bomb disposal.



We were being kept safe and could only walk on a marked cleared path through the contaminated land. Not so the children and their families who must live with danger from these dreadful weapons as a part of their everyday lives.

We were also all privileged to be able to visit the COPE prosthetic and rehabilitation centre. While there I was very much moved by the sight of two boys, around the age of my eldest two grandsons, each in a wheelchair, each with only one leg, the other lost to cluster bombs. They were being wheeled around by





friends or family. Everyone was enjoying the evening and going on with their lives with grace and courage. This sight was a stark reminder that whole families and communities are the victims of cluster munitions.

these deadly legacies of war.

My time in Vientiane has provided many contacts both in government and in civil society that I believe will enable us to be more effective in helping to rid the world of



We need those who clear the land, those who help the survivors to continue and those who are the advocacy groups, to keep working to make sure that governments accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Only when enough governments have acceded will there be a strong global norm against the use of cluster munitions, ensuring that they are never used again and cannot continue to devastate land, families and communities.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, the assembly adopted the Vientiane Declaration and the Vientiane Action Plan to rapidly advance the full implementation of the Convention and a universal ban on cluster munitions. Tragically these actions cannot save the 10 year old girl who died from a cluster bomb accident while the Meeting was underway. Neither can the shattered body of her badly injured older sister be restored. These meetings cannot be about words and diplomacy, they must be about saving lives and limbs of real people.

I thank all our supporters who make our advocacy work possible. May we see a cluster bomb-free world.

Lorel Thomas
National Coordinator

For photos of 1 MSP, including the field trip go to:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/marywareham/sets/72157625316695796/?page=8>

For amazing photos of villagers incorporating cluster munitions shells in to their homes and gardens go to: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/clustermunitioncoalition>

For more information on cluster munitions go to: <http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/> or

<http://australia.icbl.org/clusters.html>

For the Australian draft legislation on cluster munitions go to:

http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/bills/r4487_first/toc_pdf/10263b01.pdf;fileType%3Dapplication%2Fpdf

CHANGE OF NAME IN PROGRESS

At the Annual General Meeting on October 24 it was resolved that we would go ahead with the proposed name change to become **The Australian Network to Ban Landmines and Cluster Munitions**. The paper work to complete the formal steps of this process is presently being undertaken, and a new logo is being designed to reflect our name change.

Lorel Thomas
National Coordinator

MENNONITES AND QUAKERS, GARDENING AMONGST BOMBS

From the 1970s a few American Mennonites were working in Laos on a small low-key farming aid project. A civil war had started in 1953, with the communist Pathet Lao rebelling against the Royal Lao Government. Both sides received heavy external support for a proxy war from the global Cold War superpowers. Quaker aid was being spent half in royal-held areas, and half in areas controlled by the Pathet Lao. In 1975, upon the collapse of the royal government and the communist takeover, the other NGOs fled across the river, and were expelled. But the Quakers stayed “to heal the wounds of war”, and were directed north to the Plain of Jars, where 5¹/₂ years of American bombing had displaced 30,000 refugees.

In a trip in 1977 to Xieng Khouang Province, the Mennonites reported that not one permanent structure had been left standing. Those farmers who remained or returned found the land strewn with cluster munitions, and more bomblets were exposed by ploughing. The people had no concept of the technology or the dangers. They picked up these ‘bombies’ and moved them aside to a nearby pit or gully. As there was very little access to medical aid, when any bomblets exploded, those who were hit by fragments inevitably died.

At this time there were just 4 in the Mennonite/Quaker office, (in a foreign community of 200). They travelled extensively on foot, by boat and Russian helicopter, trying to assess the damage and to understand why, when the war was over, people were still being hurt.

Gradually information seeped out about the US secret ‘Interdiction Campaign’, a policy of depopulation of the Plain of Jars, intended to deny support and shelter to the enemy along the so-called ‘Ho Chi Minh Trail’. (Both Vietnam and the US had contravened the 1962 Geneva Accord recognising Lao neutrality). At that time “for safety reasons” US pilots were prevented from landing their planes with bombs on board. There were clear strictures against dropping loads in Vietnam, so the surplus bombs were jettisoned over the border in Laos, which was assumed to be largely unpopulated. A later study showed that the anticipated 5-7% failure rate of these munitions was actually 35%.

In the USA, Mennonites used US bombing records to produce a map, still widely used by teams clearing unexploded ordnance, to give an indication of the extent of bombing. Even now, the most effective method of detecting UXO, after checking the map, is with a metal detector and probing stick.

But 30 years ago, metal detectors were still scarce. A team of 12 Soviet experts assisted with removal of unexploded ordnance from 1979-80, before the Mennonites and Quakers took up the task. A heavily reinforced tractor with flail-chains attached was found to be ineffective at detonating small bombies. But their greatest success was the ‘low-tech’, low-budget ‘Shovels Project’, which was designed for mitigation rather than eradication. (Spades and shovels were then unknown in Laos). The traditional farming practice was to break up the heavy soil with mattocks at the end of the dry season, to allow the rain to penetrate the soil. Whereas the mattock is like a hammer, a shovel is like a knife – and not a single shovel blew up a bombie. When these were found, they could be carefully lifted and laid aside. Despite predictions that the Lao peasants would not change their traditional farming practices, province officials reported that farmers found shovels to be an effective alternative to mattocks.

Report by Helen Stanger

Sources & Further info

<http://plainofjars.net/downloads/Bombs%20of%20Laos-Geographical.pdf>

<http://plainofjars.net/UXO.htm>

INDISCRIMINATE WEAPONS STILL KILLING

Decades after millions of cluster bombs were dropped on Laos by US B-52 bombers, innocent civilians are still being killed and injured by their deadly legacy. While government delegates and cluster munitions campaigners met in Vientiane, a ten year old girl died and her older sister was critically injured in a cluster bomb explosion. The girls were heading home from school when they picked up the bomb to play with.

Cluster bombs are often brightly coloured or resemble a tennis ball so they are attractive to children who make up approximately a third of all cluster bomb victims.

For more information go to:

<http://www.vientianetimes.com/Headlines.html>



Ball shaped cluster bombs inside their canister

An anti tank mine has exploded in Cambodia, killing 13 people including a four year old boy and a seven month old baby girl. The only person to survive was the driver. He was initially thought to have also been killed but actually survived. He has had a leg amputated and is currently in a serious condition in hospital being treated for shrapnel wounds.

The accident occurred when the group's vehicle hit the mine in north western Cambodia. The group was returning from a day's work at a chilli farm. The recently-built road back to their home of Chang village had been partially washed away by rains in the wet season, so the driver decided to take another route down a lesser road. Although the driver knew the area was suspected of being mined, he thought it would be safe as they had seen many cattle using the road without any incident.

Landmines and other unexploded ordnance left over from decades of civil war in Cambodia are still killing people on a weekly basis.

For more information go to <http://www.maginternational.org/news/cambodia-carnage-after-antitank-mine-explodes-killing-13/>

Lorel Thomas
National Coordinator

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STUDENT POETRY COMPETITION

To help raise awareness of the issue of landmines and cluster munitions, a poetry competition was held for students in South Australian high schools and universities, closing on Sunday 1st August (the date the Convention on Cluster Munitions entered into force).

Entries in the Year 9 -10 and University student categories were displayed at Adelaide's International Day of Peace event.

Winners received Dymocks Book Vouchers for \$25, \$20 and \$15. The school with the most entrants was Cornerstone College at Mount Barker, and received as a donation for its library a signed copy of the book "A Path Is Made By Walking It", edited by Sr Patricia Pak Poy, National President of ANBL.

The Year 9 prize winning poems are published below.

Helen Stanger, South Australian Coordinator ANBLC

FIRST PRIZE YEAR 9**Landmines***by Kate Powell*

Landmines
 Silent curse
 Hidden, waiting
 Littering the landscape
 Primed and ready for destruction
 BANG
 Burning flesh
 Maiming, killing
 Destroying families
 The cowardly tool of war
 Deadly legacy for years to come

SECOND PRIZE YEAR 9**Landmines: The Secret War***By Amos Washington*

Monsters lie, lurking
 They don't like being disturbed
 They will be angry.

The elders have said
 'You must never leave the path'
 Children are naïve.

Out of the village,
 Children innocently play
 They are unaware.

A moment of peace
 But beneath where they tread
 Fires are brewing.

One small slip off track
 One foot on an unknown land
 One life is shattered.

Just another loss
 A loss to the secret war
 Pain shared by nations.

JOINT THIRD PRIZE YEAR 9**Underground Soldiers***by Reece Kramm*

Landmines are like underground soldiers
 Waiting quietly for the defenceless opponent to arrive
 Buried under thick brown African soil
 Ready to murder another victim of thousands

Landmines are like deadly monsters waiting to strike
 Programmed to explode as soon as contact is made
 Painted with colours that attract little children
 Who are desperate for a new toy to play with

Landmines are like tin cans filled with fireworks
 Exploding fiery red when touched
 Aiming to kill the enemy during a war
 Remaining to kill the civilians after a war
 Landmines are like underground soldiers

Landmines*by Esther Bennett*

The invisible killers,
 Waiting under the ground.

Ready to strike,
 On the day you're not ready.

Looks harmless,
 But a colourful killer.
 With no target in particular,
 They can be anyone's murderer.
 Just one step off the path,
 And you could disappear
 in a cloud of red smoke.

WHY DID I GO TO VIENTIANE?

I accepted the opportunity to attend the First Meeting of States Parties for the chance of being in on something momentous. I had been involved in the build-up and could now follow it through.

I was impressed by the size of the plenary sessions, with about 1000 delegates. Many were from official government delegations. The 11 on the Australian delegation included two representatives from civil society; only Albania and Germany also included civil society representatives on their delegations. There were over a hundred representatives from United Nations organizations. However, over half of us came from civil society representing NGOs and over 150 regional and international charity and advocacy groups, gathered under the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) umbrella. The CMC took a major part in the organisation of the Conference, and CMC delegates spoke on more occasions than any single country.

Some of what I saw and heard was quite confronting. But it was thrilling to hear several African government delegates who had been on the field trip with me say in plenary session that what they had seen that day had opened their eyes and would make them press their governments to accede to the Convention.

I am glad I went. I learnt a lot, and have enough material to mull over and draw on for some time to come. My chief disappointment is that people at home are largely unaware of the great progress that was made during this week towards a world free from cluster munitions, and the care of survivors and their families.

If you would like to know more than Australian TV, radio and newspapers told you, check this link to the Cluster Munition Coalition's website for a comprehensive coverage:

<<http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/>>

Helen Stanger, South Australian Coordinator ANBLC

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Donations are very gratefully received.

ANBLC is entirely voluntary, with no paid staff and a carefully minded budget, but we must still meet our costs to remain effective. Expenses include newsletter mail outs, phone calls and teleconferences, postage, travel associated with meetings. Perhaps you might consider a donation as a Christmas gift so that you can help us continue our lobbying and campaigning.

Cheques should be made out to **ANBLC**, and mailed to: **The Treasurer, ANBLC. PO Box 445 Walkerville SA 5081. We regret that donations are not tax deductible.**