

MEDIA RELEASE

21 October

Financial Investments in Cluster Bomb Manufacturers Should be Outlawed

During United Nations (UN) Disarmament Week (Oct 24-31), a bill to enact the Convention banning Cluster Munitions is reported to be tabled in the House of Representatives, though it is unlikely to contain a provision prohibiting financial institutions from funding manufacturers of cluster bombs.

The ANZ bank has been found to provide loans of \$136.5 million to producers of cluster bombs, further tarnishing the banks investment portfolio.

Mr Alistair Gee, Executive Director of Act for Peace (the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia), said, "The government should go one step further and include a prohibition on these explosive investments in national law."

"The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in August 2009 recommended that the Australian Government consider preventing investment by Australian companies that produce cluster munitions."

Mr Gee said "Financial investment in cluster bomb manufactures represents a choice to support the production of weapons that maim civilians and hinder development in some of the poorest countries. Few Australians would be able to tell you whether this choice has been made for them, by their bank or through their superannuation fund. This represents an unethical investment by ANZ and should be dealt with accordingly through national legislation in the absence of corporate morality."

"During Disarmament Week, we may see the bill rushed through parliament. I am hoping that its passage will involve robust and well-informed debate among all parliamentarians of both houses, resulting in an outcome that protects unknowing investors as well as victims and survivors of armed conflict", said Mr Gee.

New Zealand, Ireland, Luxembourg and Belgium have all introduced legislation to ban investments in Cluster Munitions.

Act for Peace is encouraging Australians to take concerted action during the UN Disarmament Week. The campaign will highlight progress toward a ban on financial investment in Cluster Munitions, work toward an Arms Trade Treaty and a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

Mr Gee said, "The goal of this campaign is also to scrutinise what the Australian Government actually spends on disarmament initiatives. We know that the average Australian taxpayer pays \$1,230 per year on military expenditure. We should also be able to see what the government is doing to promote demilitarisation and the removal of weapons which continue to fuel poverty, corruption and insecurity. "

Act for Peace supports disarmament and demining programs around the world. In June 2010 alone, our partner's program in Iraq cleared 568,000m² of land and removed and destroyed 10,512 conventional weapons and hazardous items.

-Ends-

Media Enquiries: Edwyn Shiell 0458 303 515

Further Information:

For Disarmament Week online actions and resources www.actforpeace.org.au/disarm

For a copy of the Act for Peace Disarmament Week brochure www.actforpeace.org.au/disarmbrochure

***About Act for Peace:** Act for Peace is the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. We empower war-torn communities to reduce poverty, protect refugees, and prevent further conflict. Our project partners are currently assisting more than one million people in the world's worst conflict areas, including Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, the Middle East, Burma and Sri Lanka. www.actforpeace.org.au*