**SPEECH BY HE GEOFF TOOTH, AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO UGANDA, AT THE**

**CELEBRATION OF UGANDA’S COMPLIANCE WITH ARTICLE FIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MINE BAN TREATY**

**MONDAY 10 DECEMBER, COMMONWEALTH BANQUETING HALL, SPEKE RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, MUNYONYO**

Minister of State for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Ecweru Musa Francis,

Head of the Danish Demining Group,

Representatives of all the partners in the demining of Uganda,

Australia’s Honorary Consul to Uganda, Mr Patrick Bitature,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my very great pleasure to be here today to help celebrate Uganda freeing itself of the evil of landmines.

I can’t think of a better day to do this than 10 December, Human Rights Day, the day we commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The Universal Declaration says that everyone is entitled “to life, liberty and security of person.” Landmines are a direct threat to this fundamental right.

As we so powerfully heard tonight from one of its victims, landmines are insidious and cowardly weapons that impact on the security of the innocent, on the farmer in the field, on the child playing and walking to school, on the woman collecting water for her family. Landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war remain serious obstacles to sustainable development in many of the world's countries that have been affected by conflict. They destroy livelihoods and bodies, they impact on tourism, they deprive people of precious and fertile land. They seriously impact on a country’s capacity to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

They still contaminate more than 70 countries and kill and injure more than 4,000 people per year. They have killed many, many Ugandans.

So this is a great day for the human rights of Uganda’s citizens.

Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Australian Government I would like to extend our congratulations to the Ugandan Government on fulfilling its commitment under Article 5 of the Mine Ban Convention. The Government and all of the organisations and individuals who have contributed to this should be immensely proud of their efforts.

Australia is delighted to have played a part. Like the other donors I have the honour to speak for tonight – including Norway, Denmark and Sweden - we are a strong supporter of mine action.

In November 2009, Australia launched a five-year Mine Action Strategy.

Under this strategy, Australia has committed $100 million to work towards a world free from landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. Over 5.5 million of this has gone to Uganda, to the work of the Danish Demining Group, Handicap International and the UN Mine Action Service Completion Initiative.

Australia’s support aims to reduce the threat and socioeconomic impact of these weapons, by supporting land clearance, risk education, victim assistance, research and advocacy. We provide targeted support for mine action across Africa; since 2009-2010 this has included programs in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Sudan, Libya and of course here in Uganda.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Victim assistance is a major focus of the Australian Government’s Mine Action Strategy. We have provided $2.3 million for victim assistance activities in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo through Handicap International.

Priority should be, and is, given to the integration of landmine victim services into existing healthcare, social services and disability-inclusive development policy frameworks.

Many of the activities we support - often working with international and Australian non-government organisations - are based on integrated approaches to mine action aimed at improving livelihoods of landmine survivors, their families and their communities.

Over 20 per cent of Australia’s mine action funding under the current mine action strategy has been allocated to victim assistance, to changing the course of the lives of those impacted by mines.

Australia’s Mine Action Strategy also supports the Australian Government’s Disability-Inclusive Strategy, Development for All, by seeking to ensure the active participation of people with disability in developing, implementing and reviewing Australia’s mine action programming.

Through our Mine Action Strategy, we hope to ensure that mine action is socially and economically inclusive and meets the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In his address to the 12th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction in Geneva last week, Major General Doctor Julius Oketta outlined Uganda’s commitment, including the setbacks and successes, which resulted in the achievement of being landmine free.

In his speech he noted that since 2006 Uganda has destroyed:

4,314 anti-personnel mines;

20 anti-tank mines; and

9,273 unexploded ordnances.

This is truly a remarkable effort by all concerned. I have travelled in northern Uganda and seen some of the territory which landmines had been laid. It has taken great fortitude, skill and courage for the organisations and individuals involved, Ugandans and their international partners alike, to work in such difficult environments and achieve so much.

Let me conclude today by thanking again those extraordinary organisations who have worked so hard to achieve a Uganda free of landmines - The Danish Demining Group, Handicap International and the UN Mine Action Service.

Their efforts and success would not have been possible of course without the unwavering commitment of the Government and people of Uganda.

Let us hope that what Uganda has achieved is another step to a world finally free of these dreadful weapons.

Thank you.