

Order of Australia for Cambodia JRS Director



The director of Jesuit Refugee Services Cambodia, Sr Denise Coghlan, has been made a Member of the Order of Australia in Monday's Queen's Birthday Honours List, for her service to international humanitarian aid. A Sister of Mercy from Brisbane, Denise has spent more than a decade working with Cambodians, both in refugee camps and inside the country itself. A longtime campaigner against landmines and cluster munitions, she recently took part in the Dublin conference aimed at banning the manufacture of cluster bombs. 'This is a totally immoral form of behaviour to me', she said in an interview at the time with the National Catholic Reporter. The Thai Cambodian border, she said, 'was very, very heavily infested with landmines. [But] cluster bombs were dropped much earlier - 26 million cluster bombs were dropped on Cambodia in the 1970s during the Ho Chi Minh Trail.' These unexploded ordinances continue to destroy lives in Cambodia and neighbouring Laos. Anecdotal evidence shows that cluster bombs stay active for at least 38 years, 'and probably longer in some places', says Denise. 'Millions and millions of bomblets are left [in Laos].' The director of JRS Australia, David Holdcroft SJ, has welcomed the award. 'I was very happy to Denise's name in the honours list in what I call the extra-well deserved category', he says. 'I think Denise's work has always had a breadth where she's linking both direct work with refugees and also some of the causes of displacement like cluster munitions and landmines that she'd campaigned so successfully against. Her work has been so effective within the country and she's much-loved.'

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