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Media Release

Project Compassion: Educating for Change, Vietnam

This week marks the halfway point in Caritas Australia's Project Compassion fundraising campaign; and the generosity of the Australian people has shown once again how much we all value the opportunity to improve the lives of those suffering injustice around the world.

Caritas Australia is part of an international network that works in over 200 countries and territories, empowering communities to tackle the structures of poverty and take control of their future. Project Compassion is Australia's largest aid and development fundraising event, and last year raised more than 9 million dollars in the six week lead-up to Easter.

"The money raised from last year's campaign has helped to combat poverty and injustice across the globe. This year we hope to reach new heights and raise close to \$10 million in support of our grass-roots programs and emergency relief" says Jack de Groot, CEO of Caritas Australia.

"Alongside our international partners, Caritas Australia works to provide support to those people whose circumstances have rendered them unable to help themselves, who remain trapped in the deep-seated structures of poverty. It is the extraordinary generosity of the Australian public that makes Caritas' work possible," Mr de Groot says.

In Vietnam's Hue province it is estimated that more than 32,000 people live with a physical or mental disability. Sadly, most of these people live isolated from their communities, and suffer from devastating poverty.

The Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) – supported by Caritas Australia – runs a Disability and Development program in the region, working to improve the health, livelihoods and social integration of people with disabilities by encouraging them to form support groups to learn social and vocational skills.

The program currently supports 750 disabled people and their families – including Bach, 42, who lost his fingers in a mining accident as a child. Bach and his wife have four children, one of whom requires constant care as she also suffers from a disability.

"I had no chance to do the jobs that I wished and couldn't make enough money to support my family," Bach says.

"We learnt to form a group and create plans for our households. We shared our experience of taking care of our child and started to feel confident, communicate more and access information for our daily life."

Now Bach has been elected Deputy Head and Accountant for his group. He helps other disabled people to participate in the group meetings and training and encourages them to be more confident, look for opportunities and procure loans to start their own agricultural work.

"The money we raise during Project Compassion allows us to reach out to those people who are isolated within their communities and mobilise awareness, so that equality may uproot injustice around the world," says Mr de Groot.

Donations can be made to Project Compassion by phoning 1800 024 413, on-line at www.caritas.org.au or by posting your cheque to GPO Box 9830, Sydney NSW 2001 (Please include your personal details, including your parish name and diocese)

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