



Questions & Answers

Wellington Conference on Cluster Munitions, 18-22 February 2008

What are cluster munitions?

Cluster munitions are weapons deployed from the air by aircraft including fighters, bombers, and helicopters. The weapon opens in mid-air scattering dozens or hundreds of smaller submunitions to the ground. Cluster munitions can also be deployed shot out of artillery, rockets, and missile systems on the ground. Submunitions released by air-dropped cluster bombs are most often called “bomblets, while those delivered from the ground are usually referred to as “grenades.”

What’s the problem with this weapon?

Cluster munitions pose dangers to civilians for two principal reasons. Their widespread deployment means they cannot distinguish between military targets and civilians so the humanitarian impact can be extreme when the weapon is used in or near populated areas. Secondly, many bomblets fail to detonate on impact and become de facto antipersonnel mines killing and maiming people long after the conflict has ended. These duds are however more lethal than antipersonnel mines; incidents involving submunition duds are much more likely to cause death than injury.

Who has used cluster munitions?

At least 14 countries have used cluster munitions: Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Israel, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Russia (USSR), Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, UK, US, and FR Yugoslavia. A small number of non-state armed groups have used the weapon (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006). Billions of submunitions are stockpiled by some 75 countries. A total of 34 states are known to have produced over 210 different types cluster munitions. At least 24 countries have been affected by the use of cluster munitions including Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Croatia, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Vietnam.

Why is a ban on cluster munitions necessary?

Simply put, cluster munitions kill and injure too many civilians. The weapon caused more civilian casualties in Iraq in 2003 and Kosovo in 1999 than any other weapon system. Cluster munitions stand out as the weapon that poses the gravest dangers to civilians since antipersonnel mines, which were banned in 1997. Yet there is currently no provision in international law to specifically address problems caused by cluster munitions. Israel’s massive use of the weapon in Lebanon in August 2006 resulted in more than 200 civilian casualties in the year following the ceasefire and served as the catalyst that has propelled governments to attempt to secure a legally-binding international instrument tackling cluster munitions in 2008.

What is the Oslo Process?

In February 2007, forty-six governments met in Oslo to endorse a call by Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre to conclude a new legally binding instrument in 2008 that prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm and provides adequate resources to assist survivors and clear contaminated areas.

Subsequent Oslo Process meetings including in Peru (May 2007) and Austria (December 2007) have increased the number of countries endorsing the Oslo Process treaty objective to more than 90 by the end of 2007. <http://clusterprocess.org/>

What is the Wellington Conference on Cluster Munitions?

The 18-22 February 2008 Wellington Conference on Cluster Munitions is one of the most significant disarmament meetings that the New Zealand government has ever hosted. It is also the last Oslo Process conference prior to the treaty's formal negotiations.

Representatives from approximately 100 governments and more than 100 non-governmental participants including cluster bomb survivors, deminers and advocates including a Nobel Peace Laureate and a British lord are expected. Countries will finalise preparations for the treaty negotiation and will also adopt a Wellington Declaration committing them to negotiate the ban treaty on the basis of the draft text discussed in Wellington. The NZ Cluster Munition Coalition is coordinating non-governmental support to the Wellington Conference with public talks, publicity stunts, and exhibitions planned.

www.mfat.govt.nz/clustermunitionswellington

What happens after Wellington?

After the Wellington Conference concludes, countries will prepare to negotiate the cluster munition treaty in Dublin, Ireland from 19-30 May 2008. At the negotiations, they will agree to the final terms and language of the treaty, which will then be opened signature before the end of 2008 with a signing ceremony in Oslo, Norway (where the process began). The cluster munition treaty will represent the most significant advance in the field of disarmament since the achievement of the 1997 treaty prohibiting antipersonnel mines.

Why is New Zealand involved?

New Zealand is one of six governments leading the Oslo Process to secure the international treaty banning cluster munitions (the other Core Group members are Austria, Ireland, Mexico, Norway and Peru). New Zealand's engagement on this issue is led by its Geneva-based Ambassador Don MacKay, respected for his leadership in the recently concluded Disability Rights Convention. New Zealand has extensive experience in the clearance of unexploded ordnance including cluster munitions (currently two dozen NZ Defence Force personnel are clearing cluster bomblets in Lebanon).

What is the campaign to ban cluster munitions?

The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) is a global network of 200 civil society organisations working in 50 countries to end the harm caused by cluster munitions. Founding members include Human Rights Watch and other leaders from the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines which secured the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Launched November 2003, the CMC is campaigning for the diplomatic Oslo Process to result in a strong international treaty prohibiting cluster munitions. It is also working nationally to restrict cluster munitions through domestic measures such as a moratorium or a legislated ban, as Austria, Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Norway have done.

www.stopclustermunitions.org

Who is campaigning in New Zealand?

The Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition is a group of approximately twenty local non-governmental organizations coordinated by Oxfam NZ that supports the call to stop cluster munitions from harming civilians. www.banclusterbombs.org.nz

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