

Contact:

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Aotearoa NZ CMC members:

Amnesty International Aotearoa NZ, Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, Auckland University Students' Association, Campaign Against Landmines, Caritas Aotearoa NZ, Christian World Service, Development Resource Centre, Engineers for Social Responsibility NZ, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War NZ, National Council of Women NZ, National Consultative Committee on Disarmament, Oxfam NZ, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament NZ, Pax Christi Aotearoa-NZ, Peace Foundation NZ, Peace Foundation Disarmament and Security Centre, Peace Movement Aotearoa, Soroptimist International NZ, UN Association NZ, UN Youth Association NZ, UNICEF NZ, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Aotearoa



22 August 2008

Hon. Phil Goff
Minister of Disarmament & Arms Control
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

RE: Russia's Use of Cluster Munitions in Georgia

Dear Minister:

I am writing on behalf of the Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition to urge you to ensure that the New Zealand government publicly condemns the decision by the Russian Federation to use cluster munitions in Georgia this month.

On 15 August, Human Rights Watch provided evidence that Russian aircraft dropped RBK-250 cluster bombs, each containing 30 PTAB 2.5M submunitions, on the town of Ruisi in the Kareli district of Georgia on 12 August 2008. Three civilians were killed and five wounded in the attack. On the same day, a cluster strike in the centre of the town of Gori killed at least eight civilians and injured dozens. Dutch journalist Stan Storimans was among the dead, while Israeli journalist Zadok Yehezkeli was seriously wounded.

On 21 August, Human Rights Watch issued a second press release detailing extensive Russian cluster munition strikes on 8 August 2008 near the towns of Shindisi and Pkhvenisi that killed at least one civilian and injured another in Shindisi. At least two more civilians were killed and five wounded after they handled unexploded submunitions, some ten days after the initial strikes. *The New York Times* also reported on 21 August that "there have been many indications that cluster munitions were in fact used."

Russia has denied any use of cluster munitions, but the evidence is abundant and irrefutable. Human Rights Watch researchers on the ground in Georgia have seen areas contaminated with cluster submunitions, have recorded extensive photographic evidence, and have interviewed local inhabitants as well as medical staff and civilian victims of cluster submunitions.

As a leader in the diplomatic process that created the Convention on Cluster Munitions, we fully expect the New Zealand government to condemn Russia's use of cluster munitions in the strongest possible terms. Russia has so far refused to participate in the convention, which completely prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions yet it is nonetheless crucial that any use of cluster munitions by any actor be swiftly condemned if we are to have any hope of effectively stigmatizing this weapon.

I have enclosed the letter that we provided to the Russian embassy on 18 August, urging the Russian Federation to stop using cluster munitions and start helping with the clean-up of dud cluster submunitions.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wareham', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mary Wareham
Coordinator, Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition

CC: Mr. Thomas Nash, Global Coordinator, Cluster Munition Coalition