

Contact:

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Aotearoa NZ CMC members:

Amnesty International Aotearoa NZ, Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace, 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



18 August 2008

Mr. Andrey Korniyukhin, Chargé d' Affaires
Embassy of the Russian Federation
57 Messines Road, Karori
Wellington 6012
NEW ZEALAND

RE: Russia's Use of Cluster Munitions in Georgia

Dear Mr. Korniyukhin:

I am writing on behalf of the Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition to express our profound dismay at the decision by the Russian Federation to drop cluster munitions in populated areas of Georgia last week causing the deaths of at least 11 civilians and injuring dozens more. We call on Russia to immediately stop this use of cluster munitions, a weapon that more than 100 states have agreed should never be used, produced, transferred or stockpiled.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), 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 13 August 2008 (NZ time), members of our coalition held candlelit vigils in Auckland and Wellington to remember the victims of cluster munitions used two years ago in Israel and South Lebanon. We are deeply dismayed to learn that at the very same time Russia was using cluster munitions in Georgia, the first known use of cluster munitions since Lebanon in 2006.

We understand that Russian authorities have denied their use of cluster munitions, but this has been thoroughly documented from the ground by HRW, media and others through testimonials provided by local doctors and victims, as well as photographic and video evidence. We view this evidence of use as credible and irrefutable.

Russia has issued statements as recently as 6 June 2008 acknowledging the dangers that cluster munitions pose to civilians when used in populated areas. While their broad-area effect kills and injures civilians indiscriminately during strikes, many cluster submunitions also do not explode and remain deadly. To avoid any more casualties we urge Russia to provide precise strike data on its cluster attacks in order to facilitate clean up of the cluster submunitions duds. The provision of data on the use of all explosive ordnance is a clear obligation of the Convention on Conventional Weapons Protocol V on explosive remnants of war, which Russia ratified on 21 July 2008.

Russia was not among the group of 107 states that adopted the new international agreement prohibiting cluster munitions on 30 May 2008. We call on Russia to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions when it is opened for signature in Oslo, Norway on 3 December 2008, or soon thereafter. Signature would represent an important acknowledgment that this crucial agreement enhances the humanitarian protections afforded to civilians.

We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss this matter further. Please contact me to schedule a suitable time.

Yours Sincerely,

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

Mary Wareham
Coordinator, Aotearoa New Zealand Cluster Munition Coalition

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