

NEWS ARTICLES

(Some of the important news items - October 2008)

Bus to tour Europe lobbying for cluster bombs ban

BELGRADE, Oct 2 (Reuters) - by Ljilja Cvekic - A bus carrying campaigners against the use of cluster bombs will visit European capitals in the next two months to lobby governments to ban the munitions.

"In every conflict in the last 50 years there's an increased use of cluster bombs," said organiser John Rodsted, adding it was a legacy "that simply does not go away, they don't defuse themselves, they lay in the ground, in the trees, in the rocks". Cluster bombs kill or maim thousands of people every year. Dropped from planes or fired by mortars, containers of up to 250 bomblets burst open and spread them over an area the size of four city blocks. Most explode immediately but others can be triggered years later, by touch, motion or even static electricity from someone's clothes. Rodsted, a photographer, has documented the weapons and their victims across the world for over 20 years.

The territory of the former Yugoslavia is the most affected region in Europe and the countries will need at least a decade to clear areas of bombs dropped during the 1990s wars, especially in Bosnia, but also in Kosovo and Serbia. "More than 95 percent of casualties are civilians, and the true target, soldiers, are killed the least," said Branislav Kapetanovic, who lost both arms and legs while clearing land of cluster bombs in Serbia in 2000.

In May, 107 countries adopted a Convention on Cluster Munition to prohibit the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions and provide help to survivors and those trying to clear contaminated areas. Cluster bombs are still being used however. "We saw just some weeks ago, both Georgia and Russia used cluster munitions," said Petter Eide, the secretary general of Norwegian People's Aid, which is backing the trip.

The activists on their "Ban Bus" will leave the Serbian capital Belgrade on Thursday evening and visit a string of countries before reaching Oslo in time for the signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions on Dec. 3. "We hope that more than 100 countries will gather in Oslo to sign the treaty," Eide said. (Editing by Daria Sito-Sucic and Philippa Fletcher).

Please read more: <http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/news/?id=819>

WORLD'S MOST CLUSTER-BOMBED COUNTRY LEADS REGION IN FINAL STEPS TO WEAPON BAN

South East Asian talks open in Lao PDR; (/Lao PDR, October 20th/)

South East Asian governments met today in Lao PDR, the most cluster bombed country in the world, to discuss how the new treaty to ban cluster bombs will make a difference on the ground and to rally support for the treaty signing in Oslo on 3 December.

"We strongly congratulate the Lao government for the leadership it is showing on this international issue", says Thomas Nash, Coordinator of the CMC. "Lao helped ensure that assistance to victims was at the heart of the treaty when it was negotiated in Dublin in May. This will make a real difference to the thousands of people whose lives have been blighted by cluster bombs".

An estimated 383 million cluster bomblets have been scattered across South East Asia, according to an analysis by Handicap International, with 260 million of these being dropped on Lao PDR between 1964 and 1973. Hundreds of thousands failed to explode on impact, but continue to cause injury and death to innocent people decades after the bombing. *“I lost both my arms and my eye after finding a cluster bomb whilst looking for food”*, says Ta, a cluster bomb victim from Laos. *“Now I can’t provide for my family and my nine year old son has had to drop out of school”*.

In May, after a 15 month diplomatic effort led by Norway and known as the “Oslo Process”, 107 countries adopted a comprehensive new international treaty banning cluster bombs and setting strict standards to assist and promote the rights of affected individuals and communities.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions, to be signed by over 100 governments in Oslo, on December 3rd, not only bans the use, transfer, production and stockpiling of cluster bombs, but also contains the strongest ever provisions in international law for clearance of contaminated land and victim assistance. If signed by cluster bomb affected Cambodia, Lao and Vietnam, aid for victim assistance and cluster bomb clearance in these countries should be considerably boosted.

“Since 1996, only about 364,000 sub-munitions have been cleared in Laos by UXO LAO . Yet thousands of people have and continue to be maimed or killed by weapons dropped decades ago”, says Edwin Faigmane from UXO-Lao. “There are currently not enough resources to clear this contamination. The cluster bomb treaty is the only way we can rid Laos of this deadly legacy.”

A total of six states from South East Asia agreed to adopt the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Dublin on 30 May 2008: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Philippines, as well as Australia, Japan and New Zealand. Thailand, a stockpiler of cluster bombs and Singapore, a producer, did not adopt the Convention in May, but campaigners believe Thailand’s presence at the Laos Conference is a welcome signal for the future.

The Laos Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions will run until October 22nd. It will be attended by around twenty governments. Cluster Munition Coalition campaigners from Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will also attend, as well as victims from the region and experts from Handicap International, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs.

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Media not already registered for the conference must register through the UNDP here: <http://www.undplao.org/CLUSTERMUNITIONS/mediainfo.php>