

ABOUT CLUSTERS

(Some basics and facts on cluster munitions)

What are cluster bombs?

Cluster munitions are large weapons which are deployed from the air and from the ground and release up to hundreds of smaller submunitions. Submunitions released by airdropped cluster bombs are most often called “bomblets,” while those delivered from the ground by artillery or rockets are usually referred to as “grenades.”

What’s the problem with this weapon?

Air-dropped or ground-launched, they cause two major humanitarian problems and risks to civilians. First, their widespread dispersal means they cannot distinguish between military targets and civilians so the humanitarian impact can be extreme, especially when the weapon is used in or near populated areas. Many submunitions fail to detonate on impact and become de facto antipersonnel mines killing and maiming people long after the conflict has ended. These duds are 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 15 countries have used cluster munitions: Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Georgia, 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 76 countries. A total of 34 states are known to have produced over 210 different types cluster munitions. More than two dozen countries have been affected by the use of cluster munitions including Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Croatia, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Grenada, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Vietnam, as well as Chechnya, Falkland/Malvinas, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Western Sahara.

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, 46 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 to civilians and provide adequate resources to assist survivors and clear contaminated areas. Subsequent International Oslo Process meetings were held in Peru (May 2007), Austria (December 2007), and New Zealand (February 2008). 107 countries negotiated and adopted a treaty that bans cluster bombs and provides assistance to affected communities in May 2008 in Dublin.

Read the official treaty:

<http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/englishfinaltext.pdf>

States that adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions (107 countries):

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia (FYR), Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela and Zambia.

For over 40 years cluster bombs have killed and injured civilians during and after conflict. Unexploded cluster bombs continue to kill and injure for days, months, even decades after conflict.

Cluster bombs have been used in at least 31 countries and areas:

Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Chechnya, Croatia, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Falklands/ Malvinas, Grenada, Iraq, Israel, Kosovo, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Montenegro, Nagorno-Karabakh, Serbia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Uganda, Vietnam and Western Sahara.

34 countries are known to have produced over 210 different types of air-dropped and surface launched cluster bombs. At least 13 countries have transferred over 50 types of cluster munitions to at least 60 other countries. Billions of cluster bomblets are currently stockpiled by some 78 countries worldwide and around half of these countries have now agreed to destroy them. Tens of thousands of civilians worldwide have been killed or injured by cluster bombs.

On average, a quarter of civilian casualties are children. In some areas more than 50% of victims are children. The small size and curious shapes of the bomblets dispersed by cluster bombs make them particularly interesting to young people.

The problem of cluster bombs in South East Asia

According to UXO-Lao, since 1996 only 364,000 sub-munitions have been cleared in Laos by UXO-Lao. According to Handicap International, some 4,837 people are reported to have been killed or injured by cluster munitions, many decades after the bombing ended. Many others have been killed or injured without being recorded.

Between 1964-1973, the US military dropped more than 2.4 million tons of bombs on Laos, including around 270 million cluster bomblets. Overall this was more tonnage than was dropped on Germany and Japan combined during the Second World War.

According to Handicap International:

- At least 26 million submunitions were delivered in Cambodia by some 80,000 cluster munitions between 1969 and 1973;
- At least 260 million submunitions were delivered in Laos by over 414,000 cluster bombs between 1965 and 1973;
- Nearly 97 million submunitions were dropped in Vietnam by over 296,000 cluster munitions between 1965 and 1975.

In the Asian region, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand stockpile cluster munitions that are prohibited and will need to be destroyed if they join the Convention.

SOUTH LEBANON

The most recent recorded use of cluster bombs was by Israel in south Lebanon. The UN estimated that of 4 million used, up to 1 million cluster bomblets remained unexploded after the conflict ended. In the 6 months after the 2006 ceasefire in Lebanon around 200 civilians were killed or injured by unexploded cluster bomblets.

LAOS

Laos is the most heavily cluster bombed country in the world following the 1965 - 1973 Vietnam War. Some have likened the scale of the bombing in Laos to the equivalent of a B52 load of bombs every 8 minutes for approximately 9 years.

See Handicap International's "Circle of Impact" report from 2007:

http://en.handicapinternational.be/download/0606_WEB_FINAL_REPORT_HI_BD.pdf