



PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CLUSTER MUNITION COALITION

## **Campaigners call for strong cluster bomb treaty as countries meet in ban talks**

(Lima, Peru, 21/05/07) – The international process to conclude a treaty on cluster munitions by 2008 is gathering momentum, with some 70 countries meeting in Lima this week.

“We expect countries to come to Lima with their sights firmly set on developing a cluster bomb treaty that will make a difference. They can not back away or turn to half-measures and unrealistic technical fixes,” said Thomas Nash, coordinator of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC).

Cluster bomblets (submunitions) are packed by the dozens or hundreds into artillery shells, bombs or rockets which scatter them indiscriminately over wide areas, with many failing to explode immediately. The unexploded bomblets can then lie dormant for years or even decades after conflicts end until they are disturbed, often by children attracted by their small size and bright colours.

In Lima, campaigners and governments will for the first time discuss the elements of a new treaty that will help the millions of people who live under the threat of cluster bombs. The meeting follows the agreement of 46 countries in Oslo, in February, to conclude a global treaty in 2008 banning cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

“The fact that more than 20 new countries are participating in this process shows the growing realization of the need to act urgently,” said Steve Goose of Human Rights Watch, co-chair of the CMC. “Governments must act now to stop the future disaster that cluster munitions will almost certainly cause if left unchecked,” he said. At least 75 countries stockpile cluster bombs containing billions of submunitions.

A new study by member organisation Handicap International shows that from Laos in the 1960s to Lebanon in 2006 the vast majority of cluster bomb casualties have been civilians, and a high proportion children, and the weapons consistently hinder development.

Clearing unexploded cluster bombs is notoriously slow and dangerous work. Serbian explosives expert Branislav Kapetanovic was injured when clearing a cluster bomb site in 2000. He spent years in rehabilitation having lost both his arms and legs, and is now campaigning on the issue. “I’m not expecting people to be surprised by what happened to me, I was doing my job. But the majority of people killed and maimed by these weapons are innocent civilians,” said Kapetanovic.

Participants in Lima will include many countries that stockpile cluster munitions and that have used and produced the weapon, including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, as well as affected countries such as Lebanon, Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan. China, Russia and the United States continue to reject the efforts to ban these weapons.

Campaigners warn of governments trying to avoid the Lima talks in favour of the “go-low, go-slow” process of the CCW, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, where earlier, fruitless discussions have been held on the issue.

“Like foxes in a hen house, there are countries going to Lima who want to cause as much mischief as possible. They favour a go-slow, aim-low approach intended to wreck the best chance we have had in a generation to secure a new cluster bomb treaty. We’ll be watching them closely”, said Simon Conway of the British Landmine Action, and Co-chair of the CMC.

Some governments say there are technical solutions, such as self-destruct mechanisms to reduce the number of bomblets that fail to detonate. These arguments are not valid, say the campaigners. “Both tests and field experience have proved that technical solutions are little more than illusions. Cluster bombs are indiscriminate weapons with terrible long-term effects. Governments can not get away from these facts,” said Grethe Østern of Norwegian People’s Aid, Co-chair of the CMC.

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### Notes to editors:

- At least 75 countries around the world stockpile cluster munitions and 34 are known to have produced more than 210 types of cluster munitions. Cluster munitions have been used in at least 25 countries.
- Several of the countries present in Lima are heavily affected by cluster bombs, including some who did not attend the Oslo meeting in February. Among them is Laos, the country estimated to be the most saturated with cluster bomb duds, with tens of millions of unexploded bomblets left after the U.S. bombings more than 30 years ago.
- Of the more than 20 countries participating in the treaty process for the first time in Lima, four are affected states (Albania, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Laos), one is a former user (Nigeria), one has produced cluster munitions (Greece) and six are stockpilers (Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and Yemen).
- The issue of cluster munitions was most recently brought to public attention by the conflict in Lebanon in 2006, when Israel dropped an estimated four million submunitions, up to a quarter of which failed to detonate. Cluster munitions were also used in recent conflicts including in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq where they continue to destroy lives and limbs.
- Belgium was the first country to ban cluster munitions in February 2006. Austria and Norway have renounced the use of cluster munitions through a national moratorium and Bosnia and Herzegovina has announced it will also adopt a moratorium.
- The CMC is an international network of over 200 civil society organizations in 50 countries committed to stopping the use of cluster munitions and protecting civilians from their effects. Members of the CMC network work together on an international campaign calling on governments to stop using cluster munitions and to work towards new international law to deal with this unjust weapon forever. More information on the CMC is available online at <http://www.stopclusterbombs.org>.
- The new Handicap International report "Circle of Impact: the Fatal Footprint of Cluster Munitions on People and Communities" is available at: <http://en.handicapinternational.be/index.php?action=article&numero=467>

### Interviews:

Can be arranged with a variety of international experts, deminers, campaigners, survivors and representatives from affected countries.

High-resolution images on the subject are available at <http://npaid.websys.no>