

PRESS RELEASE



Cluster bomb treaty takes shape after successful ban talks

(Lima, Peru, 25.05.07) – The Lima Conference on Cluster Munitions held in Peru this week concluded Friday, with strong and widespread support for a new treaty. Twenty-eight new countries joined the 46 states that launched a new process in Oslo in February this year to conclude a treaty by 2008.

“People around the world are being killed and injured by cluster bombs on a daily basis. We cannot undo this suffering, but the productive discussions held in Lima strengthen our belief that we can stop future deaths and injuries and ease the hardship of those already suffering,” said Thomas Nash, Coordinator of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC). “The fact that some 70 states are agreeing on the shape of a treaty only three months after Oslo shows that we can rapidly achieve a treaty that makes a difference.”

States spent three days in Lima discussing the substantive elements of a new treaty, agreeing on the need for obligations to provide assistance to victims, clear contaminated land, destroy stockpiles and provide international cooperation and assistance. This was the second such conference in the international process to ban cluster bombs. The first conference was held in Oslo, Norway in February, where 46 countries committed themselves to a new international instrument banning all cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians by 2008. Among the new countries to join the process in Lima was Laos, the most affected country in the world. Hungary announced an immediate moratorium, joining Austria and Norway, which had already renounced the weapon and Belgium, which banned it in 2006.

African states showed particularly active commitment to the new treaty and Peru launched a regional initiative for a Latin American cluster munition free zone. The road map of meetings also further took shape with announcements by Belgium and Costa Rica that they will host regional meetings in the build up to the next international conference in Vienna in December.

The CMC warned before the Lima meeting that certain countries would be trying to weaken a future treaty on cluster bombs and slow it down through the go-slow, aim-low framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

“It is worrying that Argentina, Australia, Finland, France and Poland supported major exceptions to allow cluster munitions with self-destruct mechanisms despite clear evidence from recent conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon that these mechanisms do not work,” said Grethe Østern of Norwegian People’s Aid, Co-Chair of the CMC. Other countries such as the UK and Japan pushed for transition periods where prohibited weapons could still be used. However, with widespread support for a comprehensive and effective treaty, including by more than 20 countries not party to the CCW, the CMC is pleased with the progress of talks.

“A small group of countries that came to Lima were more interested in protecting their obsolete cluster munitions than protecting civilians. We were happy to see that the countries with a genuine interest in banning cluster bombs prevailed,” said Simon Conway of Landmine Action UK, and Co-Chair of the CMC.

Debates regarding the use of cluster munitions have in the past been held within the framework of CCW without any progress.

“The CCW has been a dead-end process. Lima shows that this new process has the support and momentum to deal with these weapons before the problem eclipses the scale of the global landmine problem,” said Steve Goose from Human Rights Watch, and Co-Chair of the CMC.

The new process mirrors that of the successful campaign that banned anti-personnel landmines in 1997. The process is set to continue with international meetings in Vienna, Austria in December, in Wellington, New Zealand in February 2008, and in Dublin, Ireland May 2008.

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Notes to editors:

- Cluster munitions are weapons that can disperse up to several hundreds of smaller submunitions – sometimes referred to as “bomblets” - over wide areas. They have indiscriminate wide area effects that kill and injure civilians during attacks and they leave severe and lasting humanitarian and development consequences from large quantities of post-conflict unexploded ordnance.
- 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 28 countries participating in the treaty process for the first time in Lima, five are affected states (Albania, Cambodia, 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, Norway and Hungary have renounced the use of cluster munitions through a national 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>

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