Campaigns say "cluster bombs don't add up"

As more than 40 nations take the first step towards a new international treaty to protect civilians from the deadly effects of cluster bombs, new reports from Landmine Action and Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) highlight the continued problems caused by the use of cluster bombs by NATO on Kosovo and Serbia.

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The Oslo Conference on Cluster Munitions (OCCM), the first international meeting of a Norwegian government initiative to agree a treaty to ban cluster bombs, will take place from Thursday 22 to Friday 23 February 2007. This meeting follows the failure of UN talks in November 2006 to make real progress towards a new treaty.

A Civil Society Forum on Cluster Munitions will be held in parallel with the government meeting. This international movement for urgent action on cluster bombs comes ten years after the successful campaign to ban landmines achieved a treaty and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.

43 nations are already registered to attend.

The UK - widely criticised for its use of cluster bombs in Kosovo and Iraq - will be at the meeting, despite previous reluctance to support the Norwegian initiative. Campaign groups have applauded the UK's decision to attend but are wary of their intentions. Simon Conway, Director of Landmine Action said,

"The UK has been one of the world's leading users of cluster bombs. Their decision to attend this meeting is a strong sign that they are starting to take the humanitarian problems caused by these weapons seriously. We only hope they will support this effort and not try to derail it."

New research from Landmine Action and Norwegian People's Aid, released in advance of the meeting, provides a clear reminder of the problems caused to civilians by the use of cluster bombs by the UK and others.

According to a report to be released by NPA, 95 civilians and five deminers have been killed and injured in Serbia and Montenegro by NATO cluster bombs. As well as criticising the Serbian government for its lack of action to remove cluster bomb contamination, the report highlights that NATO has not provided the Serbian government with information on the location of cluster bomb strikes.

Simon Conway said,

"The UK has rightly been calling on Israel to release data on cluster bomb strikes on southern Lebanon in 2006. But they haven't made available information on their cluster strikes on Serbia in 1999. It is vital that Governments protect civilians from the effects of conflict, whichever side they are on."

Under a new international law, Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), such information must be made available after conflicts. However, the UK has repeatedly delayed signing up to this law.

A new study released by Landmine Action of NATO bombing records from Kosovo has found the weapons "performed poorly in a role that had little strategic significance for the outcome of the conflict." They caused more than 220 civilian deaths and injuries and cost more than $30 million in humanitarian funds to clear up, a process that continues in the province to this day, more than 7 years after use.

Simon Conway said:

"These weapons just don't add up. The civilian casualties, cost of clearing up and the cost to our reputation are just too great. In Kosovo, despite covering large areas with bombs, less than 30% of cluster strike missions were thought to have hit their targets - let alone destroyed them. We are looking to the nations assembled in Oslo to take concrete measures to protect civilians and stop the use of these weapons."

Notes for Editors: Cluster bombs have been used in at least 23 countries and have been causing excessive harm to civilians for over 40 years.

The use of cluster bombs in Lebanon during the conflict in 2006 brought the horrific impact of these weapons to the world's attention once again.

US government internal reports suggest that Israel breached agreements on the use of cluster bombs during the 2006 conflict.

The presence of Chinese manufactured submunitions, identified by Human Rights Watch as having been used by Hezbollah, shows that cluster bombs have already begun to proliferate to non-state armed groups.

Belgium became the first country to ban cluster bombs in February 2006 and Norway announced a moratorium on the use of the weapons in June 2006.

OCCM:

The Oslo Conference on Cluster Munitions (OCCM) will take place from Thursday 22 to Friday 23 February 2007 at Soria Moria in Oslo, Norway.

Nations thought to be registered to attend include Afghanistan; Austria; Canada; Egypt; Ireland; Lebanon; Mexico; New Zealand; South Africa; Sweden and Switzerland.

The CMC civil society forum, organised in partnership with Norwegian People's Aid, will be held in parallel to the government meeting with a series of events taking place in Oslo from Tuesday 20 to Friday 23 February 2007. Many leading international organisations will be attending including Amnesty International; Greenpeace; Human Rights Watch; Handicap International; International, Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL); the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Iraqi League of Doctors; Oxfam GB and War Child.

A meeting of parliamentarians is scheduled for 8.30am on Wednesday 22 February 2007 in the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo. Representatives from the UK House of Lords will attend. Bills for a prohibition on cluster munitions are currently tabled in both the UK House of Commons and House of Lords.

New Research Reports:


Contact Landmine Action for PDF files of the reports.

Landmine Action:

Landmine Action works to improve protection for civilians from the effects of conflict. Our policy, research and advocacy work focuses on establishing appropriate controls over the technology of violence.

Landmine Action has been a member of the steering committee for the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) since it was established in 2003. The CMC has a membership of over 200 non-governmental organisations worldwide.

Product Recall, the UK campaign to ban cluster munitions was launched in October 2006. For more information visit www.spreadingourvalues.com.

For more information, research reports, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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