



Betty Williams, Ireland - 1976
Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Ireland - 1976
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemala - 1992
Prof. Jody Williams, USA - 1997
Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Iran - 2003
Prof. Wangari Maathai, Kenya - 2004

united for peace with justice and equality

Letter from Jody Williams on behalf of the Nobel Women's Initiative to the Belgrade Conference of States Affected by Cluster Munitions

(September 30, 2007) We of the Nobel Women's Initiative congratulate the Government of Serbia for hosting this unique meeting of states affected by cluster munitions, as part of the "Oslo Process", leading to a new international treaty to ban cluster bombs in 2008.

As activists for peace, we know all too well the devastating impact of the global proliferation of conventional weapons of all types, and we share growing concern over the possibilities of a re-emergent nuclear arms race and the weaponization of space.

The NWI was launched in January 2006 to work with women around the world in a united effort for peace with justice and equality. We have spoken out on a number of occasions in support of a "fast track" process to eliminate cluster munitions before they become yet another humanitarian crisis in this overly weaponized world.

Arms control and disarmament are not esoteric issues that only a few military powers of this world are capable of handling – generally in negotiations behind closed doors. Any discussion related to weapons must not be based solely on military considerations, but must include the humanitarian perspective as well. The impact of any weapon or weapon system on individuals, communities, and whole countries must be an integral part of any arms control and disarmament discussions.

We applaud Serbia for this bold initiative of bringing together affected states and donor countries to stimulate a dialog necessary to effectively tackle some of the core issues of the future treaty. We lend our full support to this new process determined not only to eliminate cluster munitions, but also to effectively address the needs of those already affected. We have no doubt that this effort will succeed – as have other open and inclusive processes that bring together civil society and bold governments in innovative efforts to tackle our common problems such as the mine ban movement, the coalition effort in support of the International Criminal Court, and the disability rights movement that brought about the Disability Rights Convention.

We congratulate the Cluster Munitions Coalition and its leading NGOs for their role in pushing this issue to center stage.

Already, cluster munitions have caused human suffering and devastation in some thirty states and territories. They have been used in conflicts by more than one dozen countries. Additionally, they have been used in at least three conflicts by armed non-state actors. These numbers may not be impressive in comparison to the global contamination of landmines, for instance. The threatening part is that today some 75 countries have stockpiles of cluster munitions and these stockpiles have submunitions that number in the billions. These are ready to use and can easily create a crisis on the ground far outreaching the landmine one.

There has been much said and written what makes cluster munitions such a pernicious weapon of ill repute. The conclusion is that these indiscriminate, inaccurate and unreliable weapons cannot be allowed to proliferate. Eliminated now, the world will not face their global contamination as it has with landmines. We watched with dismay – but unfortunately with little surprise – as the “go slow” approach to dealing with cluster munitions through the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), based on the tyranny of consensus, did not produce the rapid results so necessary to avert another humanitarian disaster during the past five years of deliberations. We now look on with further dismay as some countries continue to claim that the CCW is the only viable forum to deal with cluster munitions despite the fact that more than half of the world’s states do not belong to the CCW. We need to say it openly: The CCW is for those nations that want to continue to use cluster munitions that have already been proven to claim civilians’ deaths. There is only one way to get to an effective treaty that will stop harm caused by cluster munitions and will address the existing needs - and that is the Oslo Process.

There is already a large group – one third of the world’s countries, ready to deal with cluster munitions – and it is constantly growing, as we see here in Belgrade, where majority of all affected states gathered today.

Who understands better the problems and needs of those affected by the use of the weapon than they themselves? No one.

States that bear the burden of destruction know only too well the fatal footprint of cluster munitions. They need to take the ownership of the issue and make their voice heard here in Belgrade and further in the process to ban these weapons. They know what is needed to make a real difference for those who suffered from the detritus of war. They must be heard.

We call on all governments for a genuine partnership between affected and donor countries, between producers and users and the victims, between those who have and those who don’t, to work in solidarity towards a strong comprehensive treaty to put end to suffering caused by cluster munitions.

The time for action is now.

Again, on behalf of my Nobel sisters, we applaud all those – governments, international institutions, and civil society alike – who are working together to eliminate cluster munitions by 2008. Congratulations to Norway for launching the process and to Serbia for hosting this meeting so expeditiously. Congratulations also to Peru for hosting the second major conference in this process and to others for the meetings that will come: in Vienna, Austria, in Wellington, New Zealand, and in Dublin, Ireland where we hope the cluster munitions convention negotiations will be concluded in less than a year from now.

We have already demonstrated that working together governments, international agencies, and civil society can find new ways to address the problems of human family and to make a real difference. Today we have yet another chance to change the world a little but it requires a bold vision, strong commitment and hard work from all of us.

Thank you.