

The Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions

Questions and Answers

What is the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions?

Over 100 countries will negotiate the cluster munition treaty in Dublin, Ireland from 19-30 May 2008. At the negotiations, they will agree to the final language of the treaty. The negotiations will be based on a draft treaty that sets out a comprehensive ban but certain countries are likely to seek exceptions or delays to allow continued use of their own cluster bombs. There will be tough negotiations on this and other issues in Dublin – see below. The cluster munition treaty will represent the most significant advance in the field of humanitarian and disarmament affairs since the achievement of the 1997 treaty prohibiting antipersonnel mines.

More information at: <http://www.stopclusterbombs.ie/> and <http://www.clustermunitionsdublin.ie/>

What are cluster bombs?

Cluster munitions are large weapons which are deployed from the air and from the ground and release dozens or hundreds of smaller submunitions. Submunitions released by air-dropped 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 14 countries have used cluster munitions: Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, 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, 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 are the most controversial issues for the Dublin negotiations?

There will be tough negotiations on a number of controversial issues in Dublin, most importantly on the issues surrounding joint military operations with states outside the treaty that may use cluster bombs; the definition of a cluster bomb and calls for exceptions from the ban; and calls for a transition period where states could continue to use the weapons for years after they have been banned. A number of mainly European producer or stockpiler states have taken positions on these issues that would significantly weaken the treaty. But there is also widespread support amongst a broad range of countries to keep the treaty strong. The negotiation of these controversial issues will determine the strength and effectiveness of the treaty.

For more information see the CMC position papers at: <http://www.stopclusterbombs.ie/>

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 provides 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). Over 100 countries have committed to participate in the final negotiations in Ireland in May. See <http://clusterprocess.org/> for more information.

What is the Cluster Munition Coalition?

The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) is a global network of over 250 civil society organisations working in 70 countries to end the harm caused by cluster bombs. Founding members include Human Rights Watch, Handicap International and other leaders from the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines which secured the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Launched in November 2003, the CMC is campaigning for the diplomatic Oslo Process to result in a strong international treaty prohibiting cluster munitions.

For more information go to: <http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/>

Who is the Cluster Munition Coalition Ireland?

The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) Ireland is a coalition of Irish non-governmental organisations working to achieve a new international treaty to ban cluster munitions. The treaty will ban the use, sale and stockpiling of cluster munitions, and establish a framework to assist cluster munition survivors and their communities, as well as to clear contaminated land. Coalition members include Amnesty International Irish Section, Oxfam Ireland, Trócaire, Concern Worldwide, Pax Christi Ireland and UNICEF Ireland.

CMC Ireland works to:

- increase awareness among the Irish public of the terrible harm caused by cluster munitions and what is being done about it,
- publicise the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions that is being held in May 2008, where more than a hundred states will negotiate and adopt the treaty,
- ensure the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions results in a meaningful and robust treaty that protects vulnerable civilians in times of conflict
- ensure that the Irish government stands firm as chair of the conference to deliver this result.

For further information check out: <http://www.stopclusterbombs.ie>