

Your chance to

MAKE **CLUSTER** **BOMBS** HISTORY



A Pax Christi campaign

What are Cluster Bombs?

Cluster bombs are multiple weapon systems comprising a dispensing canister that holds anything from a pair to many hundreds of individual bombs or “sub-munitions”. In appearance these bombs resemble a turnip, beer-can or yogurt drink bottle. They can be delivered from the air or fired by artillery or rockets. The canister typically breaks open in mid-air and the bombs disperse covering an area up to three football fields in extent. These bombs are designed to explode before, upon or after impact. Their purpose is to kill and injure people, destroy armoured vehicles and fire-bomb anything that will burn.

This is a British made BL755 cluster bomb that has been widely used in recent conflicts and is designed to disable tanks and kill people. The blast from each of these bombs will unleash a jet of molten copper, a ball of fire and 2000 steel fragments. In this model when the dispensing canister opens in mid-air it releases 147 cluster bombs which disperse over a wide area.



BL755 Bomblet. Kosovo © Vera Bohle, 2002

To date, over 200 types of cluster bombs have been developed by 33 countries. At present 28 countries produce them and 30 countries and regions are affected by them. Millions have been dropped over the past 40 years and to-day billions more are stockpiled by a total of 76 Governments.

Why should Cluster Bombs be banned?

Cluster bombs were originally designed for combat between massive tank armies facing off in columns and rows in large open battlefields. But to-day's conflicts are fought in the midst of civilian concentrations. Because they have **wide area effects** cluster bombs will inevitably kill and injure innocent civilians, destroying their homes. Cluster bombs make no distinction between civilians and military.

Cluster bombs are supposed to detonate before, on or just after contact but in reality a lot of them do not. **Failure rates** of cluster bombs are as high as 40 percent. Thereafter, with the slightest disturbance, the unexploded bombs are triggered by unwitting civilian victims. Thus, unexploded cluster bombs left after the US blanket bombing of Laos forty years ago continue to kill innocent civilians who go about eking out an existence in contaminated land. An estimated 80 million cluster bombs were dropped by the US during the Vietnam War.

A basic tenet of international humanitarian law, or the law of armed conflict, as it is also called, is that the right of belligerents to choose their means and methods of warfare is not unlimited.

Anti-personnel mines were banned in 1997 because they did not discriminate between the footstep of a child and the boot of a soldier. This is known as the principle of distinction.

The principle of distinction demands that belligerents must not attack civilians or their homes. Because of their wide area effects, cluster bombs can never guarantee that only military objects will be targeted.

After forty years of repeated use, a complete ban on cluster bombs is long overdue. In the final analysis a war including the use of these weapons is a war against civilians.

What are the Socio-economic Effects of Cluster Bombs?

The case of Lebanon: In 2006 Israel delivered 4 million cluster bombs in Southern Lebanon. Cluster bombs not only destroyed lives but they paralysed the affected community, destroying its infrastructure and livelihood. In affected parts of Lebanon crops like tobacco, wheat, fruit, olives cannot be harvested. Grains and vegetables cannot be planted

because the land can not be ploughed till it is cleared. In many areas roads, schools, houses and gardens are all contaminated by cluster bombs. They will continue to claim victims for years to come undermining post-conflict rehabilitation and economic recovery of the affected areas.

Stories of Cluster Bomb Survivors:



Mr. Soraj Ghulam Habib, Afghanistan:

In 2002, sometime after the US aerial bombing, ten-year-old Soraj went for a picnic with his family near his home. He picked up a yellow can

thinking it contained food. It blew up when he tried to open it killing one and injuring four other members of his family. A BLU-97 cluster bomb blew off both Soraj's legs and fingers.



Mr. Ahmed Najem, Iraq:

In 2001 a thirty-year-old man was walking around a village near Basra in Iraq when he came across an item like a tin can. When he picked it up, it

exploded and blew off his hand. He lost his arm above the elbow.



Mr. Branislav Kapetanovic, Serbia:

In November 2000, Branislav Kapetanovic, a 27 years old Serbian deminer in his attempt to clear BLU 97 cluster bombs in Bubinje, lost four of his limbs and received extensive damage to his hearing and sight. Earlier, NATO had dropped 240,000 cluster bombs on Kosovo.

Towards A Global Ban on Cluster Bombs:

An international conference on Explosive Remnants of War organised by Pax Christi Ireland in Dublin Castle in 2003 gave birth to the international effort to ban cluster bombs.

The Oslo Process to Ban Cluster Bombs: The Oslo process began when the Parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons at the UN in Geneva failed to agree on a mandate to address the issue of

cluster bombs comprehensively in November 2006. In February 2007 Norway hosted a meeting of like-minded countries in Oslo to work towards a ban on cluster bombs. Several meetings of the process have taken place e.g. in Lima, Vienna and Wellington. A further meeting will take place in Dublin in May 2008. Over a hundred countries are expected to participate at the Dublin meeting. However, the US, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and some other

countries have not participated at any of the meetings of the Oslo Process.

It is crucial to ensure that the draft text of the treaty is not weakened by those States who might be willing to ban some types of cluster bombs but insist on their right to develop and retain other types.

Two Member States of the European Union have led the way in the drive towards the elimination of

Cluster Munitions. Belgium, a NATO Member, and Austria a Neutral Country like Ireland, have legislated to totally ban the production, use, transfer and stockpiling of Cluster Munitions.

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs already in December 2006 and again in December 2007 called on the Government to ban Cluster Munitions. In the interim nothing has happened here.

What can we do?

Please, urge the Irish government:

- To join Belgium and Austria now in prohibiting the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of Cluster Munitions; thus contributing significantly by example towards securing a complete Ban on Cluster Munitions;
- To prohibit participation by the Irish Defence Forces in joint military operations involving the use of Cluster Munitions;
- To take all necessary steps to give effect to a ban on investment of public funds in companies involved in the production of Cluster Munitions and other weapons systems;
- To increase funding for clearance, risk education to protect vulnerable populations and rehabilitation of survivors.
- *Write to Dermot Abern, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 80 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.*



**The Pax Christi Campaign for the total elimination of cluster bombs needs your financial assistance.
Donations can be sent to the Pax Christi address below.**

For further information, please contact: Pax Christi Ireland, 52, Lower Rathmines Rd, Dublin 6.
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Pax Christi is an international Catholic peace movement born out of the ashes of World War II to promote peace and reconciliation between the French and the Germans. It has national sections in all continents. It deals with issues related to disarmament & security, human rights, conflict prevention, reconciliation, peace building, peace education and integrity of creation. It is open to all people of goodwill.

It has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. It is the recipient of the 1983 UNESCO Peace Education Prize and of the 1987 UN Peace Messenger Award.