

OSLO CONFERENCE ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS
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Intervention on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme

Delivered by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this conference on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We would like to congratulate Norway for responding to the appeal made by the United Nations as expressed by the former Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his message to the Third Review Conference of the CCW, last November. He stated that “recent events show that the atrocious, inhumane effects of these weapons – both at the time of their use and after conflict ends – must be addressed immediately, so that civilian populations can start rebuilding their lives.”¹ UNDP as well as other UN agencies are here in Oslo today to give concrete support to this appeal.

UNDP would also like to congratulate Norwegian People’s Aid and the Cluster Munitions Coalition (CMC) for the Civil Society Forum held yesterday and the excellent work of the CMC in raising public awareness about the impact of cluster munitions. Civil society has again played an invaluable role in raising concerns and demanding action by governments and the international community to urgently address the inhumane effects of weapons.

UNDP has a global presence in 166 countries, of which some 80 countries are known to be affected by explosive remnants of war (ERW). At least 23 of the countries where UNDP is present are currently known to be affected by cluster munitions. Thus, UNDP has first-hand experience of both the short-term humanitarian impact and the longer term development impact that these munitions have on populations and communities.

As mandated by the General Assembly, UNDP works with national authorities in a variety of ways to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This includes our work to counter the negative effects of weapons and explosive remnants of war in situations of crisis and post-conflict recovery. In 17 of the

23 countries affected by cluster munitions, UNDP provides support for building national capacities on mine action and small arms control.

In addition, UNDP works closely with other UN agencies, international and national clearance operators, facilitating access to a wide range of knowledge, experience and research capacities that can collect first-hand information about the impacts of cluster munitions. UNDP also has a network of specialists who have expertise in designing and implementing programmes that address the threat from all types of weapons and munitions ranging from small arms and light weapons to landmines and other explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions. Based on this technical expertise, UNDP, together with colleagues from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), tabled definitions of cluster munitions and sub-munitions to the Group of Governmental Experts of the CCW in March 2005.ⁱⁱ

UNDP together with UNMAS and UNICEF and with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining regularly organizes technical meetings on a range of mine action issues. In a meeting in 2005 we heard first hand accounts from mine action program directors and UN advisors and their national counterparts as well as from international and non-governmental organizations involved in operations on the ground that, amongst all the munitions found in the field, cluster munitions posed the greatest threat to the safety of local populations and clearance operators.ⁱⁱⁱ

Why is UNDP so concerned about these weapons and supportive of legal measures to prohibit cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians and have a range of negative development impacts?

Cluster munitions often fail to explode, leaving behind large numbers of unexploded and unstable ordnance that continue to cause death and injury long after conflicts have ended, thus preventing the productive use of contaminated lands.

For example, in Laos, “more than 80 million sub-munitions—bomblets or “bombies” as they are locally known—were dropped with an estimated failure rate of between 10 and 30%, leaving behind between 8 and 25 million unexploded sub munitions.”^{iv} More than thirty years after the conflict, clearance operations are still on-going. The current Lao National Strategic Plan for the UXO Programme covers a ten-year period ending in 2013, and now envisages the need to develop a new 10-year plan at the end of this period to effectively deal with the problem.

The instability of the munitions makes clearance more dangerous, difficult and therefore also more costly, in particular in ‘mixed’ fields, (i.e. where the likelihood of finding a mix of anti-personnel mines and sub munitions is high). In newer deployments, as recently seen in Lebanon, where more than a million unexploded bomblets lie hidden in fields, olive groves and gardens, people are prevented from returning home. The problem now diverts resources that would otherwise have been used in the clearance of mines and ERW from earlier conflicts delaying access to productive land even further.

In Lebanon, as of 9 February 2007, 841 individual locations of new cluster bomb strikes were confirmed totaling an area of more than 34 million square meters. In the 1 year prior to the recent month-long conflict, some 2 million square meters of land was cleared under the auspices of the national demining programme and the UNMAS implemented mine action programme in Southern Lebanon. This important clearance work now seems to have been done in vain.

As of 31 January 2007, 164 civilians have been injured and 22 killed in Lebanon as a result of recent events related to cluster munitions. In addition, twenty-two deminers have also been injured and 8 have been killed. This highlights the risks to both civilian populations and clearance operators.

Beyond their humanitarian impact, cluster munitions can also directly and indirectly impede states' abilities to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Put another way, those countries that are affected by cluster munitions will struggle to achieve the MDGs.

Let me give you an example; one of the MDGs seeks to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty (with a target to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015).

Iraq is contaminated by cluster munitions as a result of three different conflicts. A recently completed impact survey demonstrated that much of the contamination is around populated areas. A large portion of the communities in urban and rural areas depend on land to directly sustain their families and maintain their livelihoods. Many activities they engage in such as planting crops and grazing and trading in livestock have been halted, due to contamination. This loss of livelihoods has resulted in losses in income generation for many families and thus increased poverty levels.

The impact of cluster munitions has the potential to go far beyond these direct developmental effects. When a breadwinner is killed or maimed by cluster munitions, the entire family suffers. This situation is even more acute in households where women are the main breadwinners. In Viet Nam, 79% of women injured or killed by cluster submunitions were involved in livelihood activities at the time of the accident.

Cluster munitions do contribute to household food insecurity through land denial and loss of livestock, and health and hygiene problems as a result of a lack of access to shelter, water and sanitation. Survivors of cluster munitions accidents often face lifelong disabilities and economic constraints to access adequate physical and socio-economic assistance. The impact of these weapons therefore have the potential to block local and national economic recovery and long-term development, while at the same time undermining human security.

The presence of explosive remnants of war and in particular the horrific effects of cluster munitions cause psychosocial suffering thus impairing community reconciliation and peace-building efforts.

Another Millennium Development Goal aims to reduce child mortality;

Cluster munitions that remain lying on the ground are often extremely sensitive and likely to explode when disturbed. Throughout the world, many of the victims are children, attracted by the shape and sometimes the color of these innocent looking, toy-sized weapons.

A year after the first Gulf War, Kuwaiti doctors stated that 60% of the victims of unexploded ordnance, the majority of which were cluster munitions, were children under the age of 15. Several operational mine action NGOs now document similar statistics also from other locations; that children make up a significant proportion of post-conflict cluster munitions casualties and also that the average age of cluster munitions casualties is lower than those of other types of ERW.

In the Civil Society Forum yesterday UNICEF drew attention to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: that children have the right to life and to enjoy a safe environment in which to grow, to learn and to play. The recent conflict in Lebanon in 2006 demonstrated yet again the terrible impact of cluster munitions on children, both during and after conflict. It also reminds us again of those children who continue to fall victim to cluster munitions in countries where they may have been used decades before the children were even born. In a number of countries in south-east Asia like Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam, we have seen how cluster munitions still pose a real threat to the enjoyment and fulfillment of the rights of children long after the guns have fallen silent.

UNDP —along with several other UN agencies—have repeatedly expressed concern in various forums^v about the hazards posed by cluster munitions as ERW, but also the immediate threat posed to the lives of civilians during cluster munitions-strikes. Reducing failure rates through more stringent technical specifications may reduce the danger posed by cluster munitions, but will not alone resolve the problem posed by these weapons.

Adopting even relatively low failure rates may still leave areas with high numbers of unexploded sub-munitions as some cluster munitions make use of large numbers of sub-munitions. Similarly, the large number of cluster munitions that are sometimes used in conflicts can still generate a substantial amount of duds that will constitute hazardous areas until the threat has been fully removed.

Furthermore, high failure rates are also affected by factors other than technical specifications such as storage conditions, age, drop altitude, strike angles, ground and weather conditions, foliage, terrain and competency in use. Finally, self-destruct or self-deactivating mechanisms, even if proven technically reliable, will not address the dangers posed by the large numbers of existing cluster munitions in stockpiles around the world and will not address the humanitarian and socio-economic concerns at the time of use.

Cluster munitions have a wide area range and can thus be indiscriminate in their effect. If used in proximity to populated areas, civilians will be maimed or killed. As we recently

saw in Lebanon, in cases when this weapon is used within or near populated areas, the inability to target these weapons accurately results in civilian casualties, as well as destruction of basic infrastructure.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In recognition of the humanitarian and development impacts of these weapons, UNDP and other UN agencies strongly feel that it is time for the international community to urgently agree on effective legal instruments to prohibit cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the United Nations recommendations to states on cluster munitions, as articulated by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in November 2006. He called on you to “... freeze the use of cluster munitions against military assets located in or near populated areas...” and to “... freeze the transfer of those cluster munitions that are known to be inaccurate and unreliable, and to dispose of them.” And he challenged you to “...establish technical requirements for new weapons systems so that the risk they pose to civilian populations can be reduced.”^{vi}

We hope that states who are here in Oslo will take up the challenge to prevent further human suffering.

Thank you.

ⁱ Secretary-General’s message to the Third Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Geneva, 7 November 2006.

ⁱⁱ CCW/GGE/X/WG.1/WP.3, Group of Governmental Experts of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, Tenth Session, 8 March 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ CCW/GGE/XII/WG.1/WP.11, Group of Governmental Experts of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, Twelfth Session, 12 December 2005

^{iv} R. Cave, A. Lawson (2006), Cluster Munitions in Lao PDR, published by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, p. 24 (the publication is based on research requested and funded by UNDP, UNMAS and UNICEF).

^v See statement delivered by OCHA on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to the CCW Meeting of States Parties in 2003, as well as the one delivered by UNMAS on behalf of 13 UN agencies in 2005.

^{vi} Secretary-General’s message to the Third Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Geneva, 7 November 2006.