

The Cluster Munition Coalition is led by a Steering Committee of:

**Human Rights Watch, Landmine Action and Norwegian People's Aid (Co-Chairs)**

DanChurchAid, Handicap International, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, IPPNW Russia, Landmine Resource Centre (Lebanon), Mines Action Canada, Pax Christi, Protection (Egypt).



**Press release:**

## **Cluster Munition Coalition calls for strongest possible ban**

### **More than 120 countries gather in Vienna to discuss cluster bomb ban treaty**

(Vienna, Austria, 4 December 2007.) The third major international conference on cluster munitions opens tomorrow as more than 120 countries gather in Vienna to discuss a ban treaty to be signed in 2008. The conference is part of the so-called Oslo Process launched in February when states agreed to conclude a new treaty next year banning cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

"In one year we have gone from a handful of countries to two thirds of the world's nations supporting a ban. The tide has clearly turned against cluster munitions and we are confident a ban treaty will be signed in 2008," said Thomas Nash, Coordinator of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC).

Over 140 civil society representatives from around 50 countries launch the conference with an international forum today, hosted by the Cluster Munition Coalition. States will spend three days discussing the draft treaty text as they meet at the midpoint of the Oslo Process.

"Ten years ago today governments signed the treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. They now have the chance to prevent an even greater humanitarian crisis by banning cluster munitions and the hundreds of millions of bomblets they contain," said Steve Goose, Co-Chair of the Cluster Munition Coalition.

The most contentious discussions at the conference will revolve around the prohibition and definition of a cluster munition. Some countries are calling for exemptions for certain weapons such as those with self-destruct mechanisms or for a transition period where the banned weapons could still be used. Most of the countries making such proposals are stockpilers of cluster munitions with self-destruct mechanisms, such as Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland and the UK.

"Austria's new law banning all cluster munitions, including so-called self-destructing ones is leading the way. Cluster munitions are set to become morally unacceptable around the world," said Judith Majlath, CMC's representative in Austria.

Further discussions will be held in Wellington in February with final negotiations in Dublin, Ireland in May and a signing ceremony in Oslo, Norway later in the year. Non-governmental organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and UN agencies will participate extensively throughout the process.

Building on the work of the last international conference in Lima and further work at conferences in Belgrade and Brussels, the Vienna Conference is likely also to make progress on important areas of the text such as victim assistance, clearance and stockpile destruction.

"Governments have a responsibility to protect civilians in times of conflict, the burden of proof is therefore laid squarely at their door if they want exceptions. Despite the evidence from Lebanon a minority of nations will argue for an exception for cluster munitions with self-destructs, in doing so

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they are arguing for a whole new generation of civilian casualties," said Simon Conway, Co-Chair of the Cluster Munition Coalition.



Interviews: Samantha Bolton, mob. +4365034143, English, French

Thomas Nash, CMC Coordinator, mob. +447711926730, English, French, Spanish

Interviews are also available from CMC campaigners in other languages including Arabic, German, Spanish and Portuguese

Notes to editors:

o Additional press conferences will be held as follows:

o 10.30 Wednesday 5 December, Reed Centre / Reed Messe, Messeplatz 1021 Vienna: Seven individuals, including survivors of cluster bombs, share their personal stories and experiences of being affected.

o 13:00 Thursday 6 December, Reed Centre / Reed Messe, Messeplatz 1021 Vienna: Launch of a new report unmasking the failure of controversial cluster bombs with self-destruct mechanisms.

o 13:00 Friday 7 December, Reed Centre: closing press conference.

o Cluster munitions are weapons that can disperse hundreds of smaller submunitions - sometimes referred to as "bomblets" - over wide areas. They have indiscriminate wide area effects that kill and injure civilians during attacks and they leave severe and lasting humanitarian and development consequences from large quantities of post-conflict unexploded ordnance.