

The Case for a Ban on Cluster Munitions

Mennonite Central Committee believes that cluster munitions should be banned. We come to this position through a combination of deeply-held beliefs about the use of violence, and long-term practical experience with cluster munitions in affected communities. Cluster munitions have an indiscriminate track record, create the effect of a mine field, and are not "safe" to use anywhere.

Beliefs about Violence and Peace

Mennonite Central Committee was created and continues to be supported by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in the U.S. and Canada. Our understandings of Christian faith, and our history as a people have fostered a commitment to the power of love and justice as the way of God in our world. Our history is filled with the stories of people who have suffered isolation, harm, and death, rather than commit violence or go to war. We oppose the killing of soldiers as well as the killing of civilians, because we believe all people are created and loved by God. Thus we oppose all war, seeking rather to build cultures of peace and to use the power of love and nonviolence to resolve conflicts.

Our call for a ban on the use of cluster munitions springs first from these basic beliefs and commitments.

Our experience in Laos (see http://www.mcc.org/clusterbomb/report/laos_appendix.html), adds very practical and urgent reasons to call for a ban. These reasons also move us to advocate for an immediate moratorium on the use of cluster munitions. A moratorium on the production, use and transfer of cluster munitions is an achievable first step that can be accomplished in the short term. We hope that in the long term, the world will choose to ban these dreadful weapons. We offer the following reasons in support of a ban:

The Indiscriminate Track Record

During the 30+ years since the Indochina War, cluster munitions have maintained a persistent and predictable record of maiming and killing innocent people, many of them children.

It is often difficult for cluster munition technology to discriminate between civilian and military targets, because of targeting difficulties and wide area footprints.

Civilian casualties after war often occur due to the high numbers of unexploded submunitions left behind. The curious shapes and colors of cluster munitions make them almost irresistible to children. A child's playful exploration often turns into tragic injury or death.

This long track record provides the basis on which cluster munitions must be judged. For over 30 years, cluster munitions have proved themselves to be weapons with clear indiscriminate effects. For this reason alone, cluster munitions should be banned.

Mine Field Effect

In nearly every instance when cluster munitions are used, they create the effect of a mine field. Cluster munitions are small and numerous, packaged in delivery systems which can drop thousands of submunitions on an area in a very short amount of time. Since they are dropped from the air or fired from rockets and artillery projectiles, they are very difficult to track, map, or find. With dud rates ranging from an estimated 2% to 30%, they create large, unmapped minefields in areas where people live or will return to live. Many of the submunitions are buried underground, gradually coming to the surface over time, or as a result of agricultural activity.

This mine field *effect* is some discounted or ignored in international fora because it is not part of the *design* of a cluster munition. We believe the mine field *effect* is the basis on which cluster munitions should be judged, and for this reason, cluster munitions should be banned.

No "Safe" Usage

Mennonite Central Committee believes there is no "safe" or "appropriate" use of cluster munitions. It is widely asserted that cluster munitions should not be used in population centers due to their wide area footprints. This is a good principle, and should not be violated. However, this does not make cluster munitions "safe".

Even if cluster munitions are used against troop concentrations in rural areas, they may later cause large numbers of casualties among civilians who must live and work in the area. For example, the bombing in Laos during the secret air war was largely in rural areas. Yet these are the areas where casualties continue to occur even 30 years later. Gardening, preparing the rice fields for planting, herding cattle, collecting firewood, or digging for roots in the forest are all risky activities in the areas attacked by cluster munitions.

In summary, cluster munitions are indiscriminate in their effect, they create the effect of an unmarked minefield, and there is no safe place to use them. For these reasons, they should be banned.

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December, 2003