

Turn promises into reality on cluster bomb ban

On 30 May 2008, after ten days of intense negotiation and five years of tireless campaigning, over 100 governments delivered a treaty that bans cluster bombs forever.

Considered the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty of the decade, the final text exceeded all expectations, banning the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster bombs and containing the strongest provisions for victim assistance ever agreed in international humanitarian law. Campaigners from around the world, survivors of cluster bombs, former military personnel, Nobel Peace Laureates and clearance operators cheered alongside government delegates as one by one 111 nations formally endorsed the treaty.

Delivering the Cluster Munition Convention was a momentous and historic step, but the work of governments and individuals around the world is really just beginning. To become binding in international law, 30 governments must ratify the treaty after it is signed in Oslo in December 2008. Our government must be one of them.

Cluster bombs have caused more civilian casualties than any other weapon system in the conflicts in which they have been used. Designed to break open in mid-air and scatter up to hundreds of smaller bombs over wide areas, cluster bombs cannot distinguish between military targets and civilians. Many do not explode on impact, thus continuing to kill and injure innocent people long after conflict has ended.

Furthermore widespread contamination of residential, agricultural and industrial land makes it virtually impossible for people to rebuild their lives after conflict. Often it is the poorest communities that are the most victimized by the weapon.

In signing the treaty governments are committing not only to prevent future harm to civilians from cluster bombs, but, in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law, also to ensure clearance of contaminated land and medical, financial and socio-economic support to those people who should never have been harmed. By signing the treaty our government will directly improve the lives of thousands of people worldwide. All governments must now turn the treaty's text into reality.

Every signature is needed in Oslo if the world is truly going to set a new international standard. Only with wide adherence to legally binding international law will the world stigmatise cluster bombs so that it is no longer politically or morally acceptable for any country to use them. Stigmatisation is key to ensuring states, like the US, China and Russia, abide by the standard set by the treaty even though they refuse to sign it.

My organisation has joined with around 300 non-governmental organisations in 80 countries to launch a worldwide petition urging governments to honour their promises. In our country 'The People's Treaty' represents the will of the public, to never again cause unacceptable human suffering in its name.

Ten years ago, a visionary initiative banned landmines. Since that time, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines has gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures from all over the globe holding governments to their word. A look at who is using landmines now, only Burma and perhaps a few Russian units in Chechnya, reflects the

effectiveness of this public call. The same can and will be done with cluster bombs. Sign the People's Treaty today and ensure our government turns its promise into reality.

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Notes when adapting for your country:

- Please mention your country in the first line, noting whether your country adopted the treaty in Dublin or not.
- Where the letter says 'our government' or 'my government' you can specify which country you are targeting.
- When mentioning your government you can also note whether it is affected by or has been a user, producer or stockpiler of cluster munitions.
- Where the letter says 'my organisation' you should specify the name of your organisation.