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MOMENTUM BUILDS AS CLUSTER BOMB BAN SIGNING APPROACHES

More than two dozen African governments announce their intent to sign the treaty on 3 December 2008

(Kampala, Uganda: 30 September 2008) With two months remaining until the international treaty banning cluster bombs is opened for signature in Norway, civil society representatives are calling on all states to announce their intent to sign. All of the 42 African states gathered in Kampala for a regional conference today agreed to an action plan that calls for the earliest possible signature and ratification and 28 made firm commitments to sign on December 3 2008. Most if not all the 107 states that adopted the treaty in Dublin last May are expected to sign in Oslo and worldwide a total of 43 governments have already committed do so.

“I now realize that victims are not alone in their fight to ban cluster munitions,” said Ethiopian cluster munition survivor Ms. Aynalem Zenebe. “We thank those African countries that have publicly announced their support and hope they keep their promise to sign the Convention this December.” When she was seven years old Zenebe lost her right leg below the knee on 5 June 1998 when a school near her home in Mekele was hit by a cluster bomb strike. With the support of humanitarian NGO Handicap International, Zenebe has spoken out for the first time in Kampala.

The result of a diplomatic initiative known as the “Oslo Process,” the Convention on Cluster Munitions was negotiated and adopted by more than 100 states in May 2008. It will be opened for signature in Oslo, Norway on 3 December 2008, the international day for persons with disabilities.

A total of 42 African governments discussed the treaty at the two-day Kampala Conference on Cluster Munitions, of which 28 announced, most for the first time, their intent to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, DR Congo, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles; Uganda, Togo and Zambia. The Conference issued a “Kampala Action Plan” expressing support for a series of strong actions relating to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

“We’re disappointed that North African states did not take up the invitation to participate in this Africa-wide event,” said Ayman Sorour of Protection, a CMC member. “It’s still not too late to join this important Convention which not only prohibits cluster munitions, but contains strong humanitarian provisions requiring clearance of cluster munition remnants and assistance to survivors of the weapon.” Libya was the only North African state to participate in the Kampala Conference, but did not make a public statement indicating their support for the cluster munition ban. Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia were absent.

The Kampala Conference is the second in a series of regional meetings held to build support for the Convention on Cluster Munitions. States from the Balkans and South Eastern Europe met in Sofia, Bulgaria from 18-19 September. Further regional meetings are scheduled to be held in Laos (20-22 October) and Ecuador (6-7 November). The Cluster Munition Coalition, an international network of campaigners including cluster bomb survivors, is planning a series of activities and events to build support for the signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. On 1 October 2008, a 10,000-kilometer “Ban Bus” tour through Europe will be launched in Belgrade, Serbia to create awareness and secure support for the cluster munition ban.

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See also:

- Kampala Action Plan - http://www.clustermunitionskampala.ug/
- Ban Advocates Blog for personal testimony by Aynalem Zenebe - http://blog.banadvocates.org/
- Hi-Resolution Photos from the Kampala Conference - http://www.flickr.com/photos/anzclusters/sets/72157607490857108/
- CMC Fact Sheet, "Cluster Munitions in Africa" (September 2008) - http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/arms/CMC_factsheet0908.pdf
- Ban Bus website - http://thebanbus.org/
- Cluster Munition Coalition website - www.stopclustermunitions.org

Notes to Editors

What is the Kampala Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions
On 29-30 September 2008, a total of 42 governments attended this regional meeting hosted by the government of Uganda to discuss the Convention on Cluster Munitions: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

What are cluster bombs?
Cluster bombs or munitions are large weapons which are deployed from the air and from the ground and release up to hundreds of smaller submunitions. Submunitions released by airdropped cluster bombs are often called "bomblets," while those delivered from the ground by artillery or rockets are usually referred to as "grenades." Air-dropped or ground-launched, they cause two major humanitarian problems and risks to civilians. First, their widespread dispersal means they cannot distinguish between military targets and civilians so the humanitarian impact can be extreme, especially when the weapon is used in or near populated areas. Many submunitions fail to detonate on impact and become de facto antipersonnel mines killing and maiming people long after the conflict has ended. These duds are more lethal than antipersonnel mines; incidents involving submunition duds are much more likely to cause death than injury.

Who has used cluster munitions?
At least 14 countries have used cluster munitions: Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Georgia, Israel, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Russia (USSR), Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, UK, US, and FR Yugoslavia. A small number of non-state armed groups have used the weapon (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006). Billions of submunitions are stockpiled by some 76 countries. A total of 34 states are known to have produced over 210 different types cluster munitions. More than two dozen countries have been affected by the use of cluster munitions including Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Croatia, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Grenada, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Vietnam, as well as Chechnya, Falkland/Malvinas, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Western Sahara.

What is the Convention on Cluster Munitions?
The Convention on Cluster Munitions is an international treaty that bans cluster bombs and provides assistance to affected communities. It will be opened for signature in Oslo, Norway on 3 December 2008, the international day for persons with disabilities. A total of 107 states adopted the Convention in Dublin, Ireland in May 2008: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia (FYR), Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela and Zambia.