



MEDIA STATEMENT - For Immediate Release

CAMPAIGN CHALLENGES SOUTHEAST EUROPE TO BAN CLUSTER BOMBS NOW

Regional conference opens in Sofia, Bulgaria

(Sofia, Bulgaria: 18 September 2008) – Today the Cluster Munition Coalition challenged governments of southeast Europe to sign the new international treaty banning cluster bombs when it is opened for signature this December. The campaign issued its call at the opening of a regional meeting on cluster munitions in Sofia, Bulgaria.

“We challenge all governments to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions this December,” said Mr. Thomas Nash, coordinator of the international Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC). *“Last month’s use of cluster munitions in Georgia was an unwelcome reminder of the need for this comprehensive ban agreement, and not weak regulations that are easily ignored,”* he added.

In May 2008 more than 100 states agreed to ban cluster bombs because they kill and injure too many civilians both during and after attacks. The Convention on Cluster Munitions will be opened for signature in Oslo, Norway on 3 December 2008.

“We urge Greece, Turkey, Romania and all states that have not yet endorsed the cluster bomb ban to sign the Convention this December,” said Ms. Muteber Öğreten, coordinator of the Initiative for a Mine Free Turkey, a CMC member. *“This is the most significant humanitarian and disarmament treaty in more than a decade. Signing it will help prevent civilian casualties and reinforce peace within our region,”* she added.

At total of 24 states from the Regional Cooperation Council (the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe) adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions in May 2008. It is uncertain if the other RCC member states will sign the Convention this December: Finland, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Turkey, and the United States.

“This region has experienced first-hand the humanitarian consequences of this deadly weapon and should not hesitate to ban it,” said Serbian cluster bomb survivor and former deminer Mr. Branislav Kapetanovic. *“This Convention is an important means to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict”.* Kapetanovic lost both hands and feet in November 2000, when a BLU 97 submunition he was he attempting to clear from an airstrip after a NATO air strike exploded.

In Southeast Europe, cluster munitions have been used in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Globally at least 77 countries have stockpiled cluster munitions, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovakia.

Nash, Kapetanovic, and Oğreten are part of a civil society delegation attending the Sofia Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions from 18-19 September 2008. Ten governments from the region are participating in this regional meeting hosted by the government of Bulgaria to discuss the new international treaty banning cluster bombs and requiring their clearance and assistance to survivors.

See also:

- CMC Fact Sheet on Cluster Munitions in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia

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Notes to Editors

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."

What's the problem with this weapon?

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.

Why is a ban on cluster munitions necessary?

Simply put, cluster munitions kill and injure too many civilians. The weapon caused more civilian casualties in Iraq in 2003 and Kosovo in 1999 than any other weapon system. Cluster munitions stand out as the weapon that poses the gravest dangers to civilians since antipersonnel mines, which were banned in 1997. Yet there is currently no provision in international law to specifically address problems caused by cluster munitions. Israel's massive use of the weapon in Lebanon in August 2006 resulted in more than 200 civilian casualties in the year following the ceasefire and served as the catalyst that propelled governments to ban the weapon in 2008.

What is the Oslo Process?

In February 2007, 46 governments met in Oslo to endorse a call by Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre to conclude a new legally binding instrument in 2008 that prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians and provide adequate resources to assist survivors and clear contaminated areas. Subsequent International Oslo Process meetings were held in Peru (May 2007), Austria (Dec. 2007), and New Zealand (Feb. 2008). 107 countries negotiated and adopted a treaty that bans cluster bombs and provides assistance to affected communities in May 2008 in Dublin.

States that adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions (107)

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.