

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
55th MEETING**

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**IFRC Headquarters, Geneva
Auditorium (Basement)**

**Explosive Remnants of War: Draft Statement for the meeting on
17-18 Nov of the CCW**

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Inter Agency Standing Committee, or IASC, it is a great honour for me to address this important Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The IASC represents a very large part of the humanitarian assistance community, comprising all UN agencies involved in humanitarian action, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, three major NGO consortia as well as other relevant governmental organisations.

Much has been done in the past decade to address the threat posed by anti-personnel mines and action is now being taken to acknowledge the impact of Explosive Remnants of War in general. The IASC appreciates the efforts within the CCW to address the issue of ERW, and to make users accountable for the explosive pollution they leave behind. However, we are concerned that within these efforts not enough has been done to regulate the use of cluster munitions, which pose a particularly horrific threat both directly and indirectly to the well being of civilian populations from Africa to the Middle East, from the Balkans to Central and South East Asia. IASC members deal on a daily basis with the terrible carnage wrought by cluster munitions.

It is the IASC view - based on our experience in the field - that above and beyond the danger created by ERW, cluster munitions pose an exceptional threat because they look innocuous, are generally very sensitive and extremely dangerous. In some countries, the threat to civilians is posed almost exclusively by unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions. These not only lie on the surface, but are also buried in the ground, ready to explode when struck by the hoe of a farmer preparing fields for sowing, or villagers digging the foundations for a house or a health centre. Air-dropped munitions can penetrate deep into the ground, sometimes only reappearing to pose a threat many years after they were dropped. In south east Asia, many farmers live in a constant state of fear, knowing that even after several years of intensive cultivation, a paddy field may still contain lethal bomblets that can rise to the surface to kill or maim at any time.

Children, especially boys, are particularly vulnerable to unexploded cluster munitions, which are normally visible and attractive to the curious and the innocent. For example, Lechayev Islam was playing with friends in Grozny last summer. One of

them picked up a brightly coloured object lying on the ground. It was an unexploded cluster munition. Five of his friends were killed and 12-year-old Islam lost both eyes and both hands. Such incidents are repeated every day, in former battle areas across the globe.

In the months following the entry of NATO into Kosovo, children and adults were regularly killed and mutilated by cluster munitions. In Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, even thirty years after the war has ended, unwary and innocent children are still regularly killed or suffer horrific injuries. Nor are professional deminers exempt from the effects - two experienced Lao mine action professionals were killed in Xieng Khouang province in 2002 whilst dealing with unexploded cluster munitions. In addition, unexploded cluster munitions across the world curtail access by humanitarian workers to people in need.

In 2001, the ICRC proposed an optional protocol to this forum, not only to define the responsibilities of those who create the pollution of explosive remnants of war but also to restrict the use of cluster munitions in proximity to civilians. This initiative was widely supported in the humanitarian community.

Although we recognise and appreciate the efforts of State Parties to address the overall problem of ERW, the issue of cluster munitions has not been adequately addressed. The IASC therefore calls for an immediate moratorium on the use of cluster munitions until such time as effective legislation is in place to regulate their use. We owe this to the innocent civilians who continue to be maimed and killed by these inhumane weapons.

Thank you.