

## **Statement**

# **A CALL FOR A FREEZE ON THE USE OF CLUSTER MUNITIONS**

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November 2003

Endorsed by IASC Principals

**STATEMENT BY THE INTER AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
(IASC) TO THE MEETING OF STATE PARTIES TO THE  
CONVENTION ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON THE  
USE OF CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE  
DEEMED TO BE EXCESSIVELY INJUROUS OR TO HAVE  
INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS**

**27 NOVEMBER 2003**

**DELIVERED BY MR. ROSS MOUNTAIN, ASSISTANT EMERGENCY  
RELIEF COORDINATOR AND DIRECTOR, OCHA GENEVA**

**A CALL FOR A FREEZE ON THE USE OF CLUSTER MUNITIONS**

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 State Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Chaired by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, the principal humanitarian advisor to the UN Secretary-General, the IASC is a unique forum for humanitarian dialogue and decision-making. The Standing Committee comprises<sup>1</sup> all the UN agencies involved in humanitarian action, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the World Bank, IOM and three consortia representing several hundred NGOs.

Much has been done in the past decade to address the threat posed by anti-personnel mines, and the IASC appreciates the efforts being made within the CCW to address the issue of Explosive Remnants of War. From the humanitarian worker's perspective, it is essential that ERW pollution be limited. Parties to conflict must be held accountable for the use, the cleanup and the long term effects of the weapons they employ. Based on our work in the field, the IASC is convinced that within the overall problem of ERW, cluster munitions pose an exceptional humanitarian threat both during and after conflict. For example by June 2000, following the entry of NATO into Kosovo, it was estimated that 80 children had been killed or injured by unexploded cluster munitions, compared to about 60 from antipersonnel mines. We are extremely concerned that little has been done to regulate the use of these terrible weapons.

Routinely, an estimated 5 to 30% of cluster munitions fail to explode when fired or dropped, either penetrating below the ground on impact, or remaining on the surface. Those under ground can seriously impede the safe cultivation of land and the development of infrastructure. This is the case in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam where they still pose a terrible threat, even 30 years after the end of conflict. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Full members: FAO, OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, UNHCR  
Standing invitees: Interaction, ICRC, IFRC, ICVA, IOM, UNHCHR, RSG-IDPs, SCHR, World Bank

of these munitions lie very deep, out of the detection range of current technology. For example, in paddy fields cluster munitions periodically rise to the surface during the wet season, killing farmers even in areas that have previously been cleared and declared risk free. Apart from the indiscriminate carnage, and the resultant impact on families and communities, such incidents perpetuate fear as people struggle to survive in an already harsh environment.

Cluster munitions that remain lying on the surface are often extremely sensitive and likely to explode when disturbed. Throughout the world, many of the victims are children, attracted by the shape and sometimes the colour of these innocent looking, toy-sized weapons. A year after the first Gulf War, Kuwaiti doctors stated that 60% of the victims of unexploded ordnance, the majority of which were cluster munitions, were children aged 15 and under.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch estimated that in Iraq more than 13,000 cluster munitions were used, containing a total of 1.8 to 2 million sub munitions. Even applying a conservative failure rate of 10%, this constitutes 180,000 – 200,000 sub munitions waiting to indiscriminately wound or kill.

The Mine Action Program in Afghanistan has documented 234 cluster strike areas from the Coalition action of 2001. Even with Coalition information on these strike areas, the programme has expended immense effort in survey and clearance over the last two years. The cluster munitions used by the coalition were of a type new to Afghanistan and mine action teams had to be retrained to deal with them. This compounded an already serious problem, diverting resources that would otherwise have been deployed in the clearance of existing cluster munitions from earlier conflicts. Until cleared, these strike areas cannot be considered safe, either for civilians going about their daily lives, or for humanitarian workers.

Although we recognise and appreciate the efforts of State Parties to address the problem of ERW, the IASC is concerned that the issue of cluster munitions has not been adequately addressed. On reflection we believe that those who use cluster munitions are unable to prevent the unacceptable effects that these weapons have on civilians both during and after conflict. The IASC members therefore call for an immediate freeze on the use of cluster munitions until effective legal instruments that resolve humanitarian concerns are in place. We owe this to the innocent civilians who continue to be maimed and killed by these inhumane weapons.

Thank you.