



The Ploughshares Monitor

Summer 2008, volume 29, no. 2

Cluster bomb meeting drafts treaty

By Kenneth Epps

A two-week international meeting in Dublin ended May 30 with an agreed text for a treaty to ban existing types of cluster bombs, destroy stockpiles within eight years, and provide crucial victim assistance.

Cluster munitions can be fired by artillery or dropped from military aircraft to spread dozens or even hundreds of small “bomblets.” Although these munitions were designed to attack troop and vehicle concentrations, their use often results in significant civilian deaths and injuries when the bomblets fail to detonate on initial impact. The munitions become de facto landmines that can be triggered by livestock, farmers, or children mistaking them for toys.¹

In February 2007, 46 nations met in Norway and agreed to the “Oslo Process” to obtain an international treaty to ban cluster munitions by the end of 2008. The purpose of the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions in May, attended by 111 states, was to draft the final text of the treaty to be signed in Oslo in December. Going into the Dublin meeting, NGO observers were concerned about the influence of non-participatory states, especially the US, Russia, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan, which are the main users and makers of cluster bombs. But a compromise suggested by the United Kingdom—a conference participant and also a prominent cluster munitions user—helped to achieve the final agreement on the treaty text.

Compared to the leadership shown by Canada in the negotiation of the 1997 landmines treaty, Canadian participation in the Oslo Process has been a disappointment. Canadian campaigners at the Dublin meeting delivered a letter of protest to the Canadian embassy in Dublin, calling on the Prime Minister to support a strong treaty. Campaigners were reacting to Canadian attempts to weaken the treaty text by including an “interoperability” provision that would allow signatory states (like Canada) to cooperate with non-signatory states (like the US) in joint operations involving the use of cluster munitions. In the end, Canada and other NATO states were able to obtain this significant concession.

Despite some treaty weaknesses, civil society groups campaigning for the cluster munitions ban were pleased with the Dublin meeting results. On the last day of the meeting, Mines Action Canada, the Canadian umbrella organization participating in the international Cluster Munitions Coalition of NGOs, launched a “People’s Treaty” to support the Oslo Process. As with the “People’s Treaty” created in 1997 for the Ottawa landmine process, individuals and organizations can pledge support for the global cluster munitions treaty.²

Notes

1. See also Janis Grychowski, "Preventable harm, foreseeable solution: The campaign to end the use of cluster munitions" in the Autumn 2007 *Ploughshares Monitor* (<http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/monitor/mons07e.pdf>).
2. More information is available on the People's Treaty at www.minesactioncanada.org/peoples_treaty and on cluster munitions at www.stopclustermunitions.org. Project Ploughshares is a member of Mines Action Canada.