

# Convention on Cluster Munitions FAQs

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### **What is the Convention on Cluster Munitions?**

Sharing many features with the 1997 Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines and supported by many of the same governments, individuals and organizations that created that treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions calls for the clearance and destruction of virtually all existing cluster munitions. It also includes novel measures on victims' human rights and provisions for healthcare and social inclusion.

In the summer of 2006, Israel fired millions of cluster submunitions into southern Lebanon, with an estimated 1 million failing to explode at impact. Hezbollah reportedly fired a smaller number of cluster submunitions into northern Israel at the same time. The 2006 exchange raised a humanitarian outcry, and at the end of that year, Norway announced that it would take the lead in restricting the weapons after Russia, the United States, and some other countries party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons failed to accelerate the pace of work on the weapons in that forum. The so-called Oslo process drew on a nongovernmental movement that had already coalesced around the weapons. Through major conferences in Oslo (February 2007), Lima (May 2007), Vienna (December 2007), Wellington (February 2008), and smaller, regional meetings, the Oslo process expanded to include more than 100 countries that agreed to the text of the convention on May 30, 2008 in Dublin.

### **What are cluster munitions?**

Cluster munitions are bombs, rockets, and artillery shells that disperse small submunitions over broad areas. Many of these submunitions fail to explode initially, later injuring or killing noncombatants.

The weapons date back to World War II. The United States, which possesses a stockpile of more than 700 million submunitions, used the weapons in the 1960s and 1970s in Southeast Asia, leaving an estimated 20 million unexploded bomblets in Laos alone at the end of the Vietnam War. The United States also used the weapons in Iraq in the early stages of the present conflict. Most recently, Russia and Georgia used the weapons against each other in August of this year.

### **What is current U.S. policy?**

On July 9, the Department of Defense released a three-page memo outlining U.S. cluster munitions policy that explicitly claims a military utility for the weapons against massed formations as well as dispersed and moving targets, while also emphasizing a need to "minimize the potential unintended harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure." The policy mandates that by 2018 the Defense Department will not use, sell, or transfer cluster munitions with a failure rate greater than 1 percent. Until then, any usage of weapons not meeting that threshold must be approved by a combatant commander. Since 2005, department policy has prohibited procurement of new weapons that do not meet that reliability level, and current law prohibits their transfer during this fiscal year.

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### What is President-elect Obama's record?

To the best of our knowledge, President-elect Obama has not officially indicated whether he supports the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In answers to an Arms Control Today survey this September, he stated:

"In general, I strongly support international initiatives to limit harm to civilians caused by conventional weapons. In the Senate, I...voted for an amendment offered by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Leahy prohibiting the use or transfer of cluster munitions absent rules of engagement ensuring they would not be employed near concentrations of civilians.\*

"As president, I will help lead the way on these issues. Our military has legitimate concerns on these issues, and I look forward to consulting closely with leadership at the Department of Defense as we shape policies on these key issues. At the same time, I recognize that our forces have been moving away from using cluster munitions and anti-personnel landmines ourselves, and these trends can be accelerated with targeted investments in innovative technologies."

\* This 2006 amendment, S.Amnd.4882, failed by a vote of 30 to 70.

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President-elect Obama's responses to Arms Control Today [survey](#).

Convention on Cluster Munitions signing [conference](#).

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