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Dramatic increase in cluster munition victims highlights need to respect global ban

Annual Monitor report charts progress and set-backs in eradicating cluster munitions

(Geneva, 5 September 2023) An alarming rise in the number of civilians killed and injured by cluster munitions in the past year underscores the urgent need to end use of these weapons and for all countries to join the global ban, said the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) today upon releasing its *Cluster Munition Monitor 2023* report.

“The shocking increase in new civilian casualties from cluster munitions serves as a stark reminder of the devastating impact these heinous weapons have on civilians, including children.” said Tamar Gabelnick, Director of the Cluster Munition Coalition. “All countries that have not banned these weapons must do so immediately. There can be no excuse for their continued use.”

Cluster munitions are weapons that are fired from the ground by artillery, rockets, missiles, and mortar projectiles, or dropped by aircraft. They open in the air to disperse multiple submunitions or bomblets over a wide area. Many submunitions fail to explode on initial impact, leaving remnants that indiscriminately injure and kill like landmines for years, until they are cleared and destroyed. Contamination from cluster munitions remnants denies access to agricultural land, creates barriers to socio-economic development, and hinders the delivery of humanitarian assistance and essential services.

The annual Cluster Munition Monitor report finds that Russia has repeatedly used cluster munitions in Ukraine since its February 2022 invasion of the country, while Ukraine has also used them to a lesser extent. Government forces in Syria and Myanmar also used cluster munitions during 2022. None of these countries have signed or ratified the 2008 treaty banning cluster munitions.

According to the Monitor report, civilians accounted for 95% of cluster munition casualties recorded in 2022, the latest year covered by the report’s casualty statistics. There were at least 1,172 new cluster munition casualties across eight countries in 2022 (Azerbaijan, Iraq, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen). Of these, 987 were killed or wounded in cluster munition attacks and at least 185 people were killed or wounded by cluster munition remnants. Children made up 71% of casualties from cluster munition remnants.

In Ukraine alone, cluster munition attacks killed and injured at least 890 people in 2022, the vast majority civilians. The other casualties from cluster munition attacks were recorded in Syria and Myanmar.

Previously, *Cluster Munition Monitor 2022* identified 149 casualties from remnants of cluster munitions in 2021 and did not record any new casualties from cluster munition attacks.

In July 2023, the United States began transferring an unspecified quantity of its stockpiled 155mm artillery-delivered cluster munitions to Ukraine. The transfer decision has been criticized by at least 21 government leaders and officials.

“New transfers and use of cluster munitions are of grave concern due to the documented harm to civilians and fact that a majority of countries have banned these weapons,” said Mary Wareham, Ban Policy Editor of *Cluster Munition Monitor 2023* and Arms Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch. “The world cannot afford a cautious or complacent response; governments must unite to firmly condemn any use of cluster munitions by any actor in any circumstance.”

The Convention on Cluster Munitions comprehensively prohibits cluster munitions and requires destruction of stockpiles and clearance of areas contaminated by cluster munition remnants, as well as the provision of risk education and assistance to victims.

A total of 112 countries have ratified or acceded to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, while 12 more have signed. South Sudan acceded to the convention on 3 August 2023, while Nigeria ratified it on 28 February 2023.

There have been no confirmed reports or allegations of new use, production, or transfers of cluster munitions by any State Party since the convention was adopted in Dublin, Ireland on May 30, 2008.

The convention’s states have made steady progress in implementing the convention. Bulgaria destroyed the last of its stockpiled cluster munitions at the end of June 2023. Collectively, Bulgaria, Peru, and Slovakia destroyed a total of at least 4,166 stockpiled cluster munitions and 134,598 submunitions during 2022 and the first half of 2023.

States Parties to the convention with cluster munition contamination cleared more than 93 square kilometers in 2022, destroying at least 75,525 submunitions and other cluster munition remnants.

Cluster munitions cause severe blast, burn and fragmentation injuries that result in life-long medical needs for most survivors. Victim assistance is a core legal obligation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, yet States Parties with survivors face numerous challenges in meeting this obligation. In Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Somalia, healthcare systems face shortages due to severe national economic crises. Ongoing conflict in cluster munition affected countries outside the convention, such as Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, also impeded the delivery of vital services.

“There is a great need for swifter emergency responses for victims of cluster munitions as well as for improved access to rehabilitation services. This need is critical for survivors living in rural and remote areas particularly” said Loren Persi, Impact Editor of *Cluster Munition Monitor 2023*. “To avoid even more casualties, affected countries need to accelerate the clearance of remnants and to deliver focused awareness campaigns for those most at risk.”

Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor is the research and monitoring wing of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)-Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) a global civil society coalition present in over 100 countries and working for a world without antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions. This is the 14th annual civil society monitoring report on cluster munitions.

The CMC will distribute the *Cluster Munition Monitor 2023* report at the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions taking place at the United Nations in Geneva from 11-14 September. The report focuses on calendar year 2022 with information included up to August 2023, where possible.

Ends

For more information, see:

- Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, www.the-monitor.org
- Cluster Munition Coalition, www.stopclustermunitions.org

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