

Appeal to governments from the Cluster Munition Coalition

Oslo, 21 February 2007

The Oslo Civil Society Forum appeals to governments to take urgent and concrete action at the Oslo Conference on Cluster Munitions to address the growing humanitarian concerns caused by cluster munitions. The participants in this forum have come from 35 countries to express our support for the Oslo Conference on Cluster Munitions and our expectations of the governments meeting there this week.

For over 40 years cluster bombs have killed and injured civilians in conflicts across the globe. Even when the guns fall silent, these weapons continue to threaten lives and livelihoods, everyday. We are survivors, deminers, doctors, victim assistance professionals, risk education practitioners, former soldiers, academics, campaigners and concerned citizens - and we also speak for a growing number of parliamentarians - who have come here to say that the suffering caused by this weapon needs to end now. Previous international efforts to address the problem have failed: it is now time for committed governments to act decisively and show their leadership in bringing about a new norm rejecting this unjust weapon.

The Cluster Munition Coalition calls on all governments immediately to stop the use, trade or production of cluster munitions: weapons that offend the public conscience. This moratorium on use, trade or production must remain in place until a new treaty has been agreed that prohibits these unacceptable weapons.

Governments gathered in Oslo should firmly commit to concluding a new international treaty in 2008 that will put an end to the human suffering caused by cluster munitions.

Governments should agree to a clear action plan for the next two years with steps at the national, regional and international levels that will facilitate the development, negotiation and conclusion of a new treaty in 2008.

The international community waited much too long before acting to ban antipersonnel landmines. We must not make the same mistake again with cluster munitions. We have the chance now to prevent a future humanitarian crisis akin to the plague caused by landmines in the 1980s and 1990s. The Oslo Conference and the process it is launching offer the first genuine chance in decades to make real progress in protecting civilians from the deadly effects of cluster munitions. As governments meet in Oslo this week they must take this opportunity: with millions and millions of cluster bombs containing billions of submunitions in stockpiles and ready to be used, the price of failure would be far too great.

The message from the Cluster Munition Coalition and from civil society around the world is clear: cluster munitions go against everything we stand for as humanitarian and human rights organisations; the consistent harm caused by these indiscriminate weapons is unacceptable and requires an urgent prohibition on their use, production, trade, and stockpiling.