



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Defending the Cluster Munition Convention: A critical stand for a life-saving treaty

The 2023 Cluster Munition Monitor published in September 2024 continues to reveal numerous uses of this weapon, as well as new victims.

At a time when Lithuania has recently withdrawn from the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, HI reminds the long-term impact of cluster munition and the importance of the Oslo Convention to protect civilians.

“In its 14 years of existence, the Oslo Convention has been incredibly effective in protecting civilians: two thirds of the countries in the world adhere to the values of the Oslo Convention; producers of this weapon have decreased by a third, stockpiles of states parties are destroyed, significant support has been provided to survivors and needs to continue. The Convention’s 12th Meeting of States Parties will take place at the United Nations in Geneva on Sept. 10. Parties to the Convention need to condemn Lithuania’s decision to withdraw from it. They must defend the Convention and also condemn any use of cluster munitions by any actor, as well as the long-term humanitarian impact that results from it. Any civilian casualty is an outrage.”

HI Advocacy Director, Anne Héry

Worrisome development in 2023

- The 2024 Monitor recorded a **total of 219 cluster munition casualties** in 2023, a figure that is certainly significantly underreported due to limited access to conflict zones and inconsistencies in data collection. Also, the number of indirect victims is again much higher as the contamination of land prevents access to the necessities of life.
- **Civilians accounted for a staggering 93% of all recorded casualties** in 2023, with children particularly at risk.
- In 2023, **there were 118 casualties from cluster munition attacks and 101 from unexploded submunitions. The casualties were recorded in 9 countries.**
- Children accounted for almost half (47%) of all casualties from cluster munition remnants in 2023.
- Ukraine remains the epicentre of cluster munition attacks for the second consecutive year, with at least 90 casualties recorded in 2023.
- Other affected regions by cluster munitions attacks include Myanmar (13 casualties from attacks); Syria (15); and Russia, which reported one civilian casualty.
- In 2023, casualties from unexploded submunitions were documented in Iraq (26), Laos (8), Lebanon (3), Mauritania (3), Azerbaijan (1), Syria (13), Yemen (30), and Ukraine (17).

The long-term impact of cluster munitions in the most contaminated country: Laos



Ms On Keo at the community centre of her village, Thabuk © HI



Ms. On Keo, a 58-year-old, is a rubber farmer from Thabuk Village, Khoua District, Laos. She shares her experience on the impact of unexploded ordnance (UXO) on her community. HI cleared her village in July 2023.

Thabuk village has a history of conflict and contamination. Could you describe the situation and its impact on your community?

Our village was heavily affected by the conflict between 1962 and 1971. Aircraft bombs, including cluster munitions, were dropped here, on our agricultural land and in the mountains. All villagers had to flee and hide in holes and caves to survive. It resulted in a heavy contamination by exploded ordnance that made very unsafe to use the land for farming.

How did the presence of unexploded ordnance affect your daily life and farming activities?

In the past, while working on my land, I found 10 or 20 cluster munitions. At that time, I collected them and threw them into the river because I did not know what to do. I learnt later that what I did was extremely dangerous. When I heard about accidents involving a neighbour, I became even more scared and cautious while working on my land. The presence of unexploded ordnance, including cluster bombs, made me very afraid to plant cassava and rubber trees. I felt unsafe to use agricultural materials, and I was constantly worried about potential accidents.

Do you remember any specific accidents caused by UXO in your area?

Yes, in 1989, three boys were collecting wild potatoes in the mountains. Unfortunately, their digging fork hit a cluster munition, which detonated. The explosion killed two of the boys and injured the third, who still has shrapnel in his head to this day.

How has the depollution of unexploded ordnance impacted your community?

The clearance conducted by HI has a huge impact. Since the operation, I feel much safer and more confident using my land for rubber farming. It has also helped increase our income and allowed my family to work without fear. We know better the threats and what to do. Comparing before and after, villagers are now much less worried about unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions, and people have adapted to living in previously contaminated areas. In the past, people didn't understand the danger, and accidents happened. Children like to play with strange objects. Since the project came in, people are now aware of the dangers of playing with unknown objects.

What are your hopes and plans for the future now that the land has been cleared?

I plan to plant more rubber trees and possibly build a house in the future. I hope HI and the government will continue to support land clearance in Thabuk village because there are still many areas that haven't been surveyed or cleared yet. We need the UXO clearance project to continue. It would also be beneficial to have a project to build a bridge across the river.



HI has released 7,000,000 sqm of land through clearance activities that were contaminated by explosive ordnance (5,800,000 sqm for agriculture and 1,200,000 sqm for development) in confirmed hazardous areas that represented 20,000,000 sqm of land in three provinces (Savannakhet, Houaphan, and Phongsaly) from 2006 to 2023. The organisation has destroyed near 50,000 explosive engines since 2006. A total of 136,000 people benefited from these HI disposal activities. HI employed 40 explosive ordnance experts in 2023 and currently has 25 experts working in Phongsaly province in 2024. A total of 7,600 people benefited from risk education sessions from 2019 to 2023. Around 200 people benefited from victim assistance programs from 2019 to 2023.

The Convention at risk

Lithuania has officially withdrawn from the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions on July 25. This decision comes amid a risk of gradual erosion of international standards in recent years that is unacceptable: one year ago, the United States decided to provide Ukraine with cluster munitions and have continued to do so.

Germany media outlet ARD revealed on July 25 that US cluster munitions stored on a US military base in Germany have been transferred to Ukraine for use in the war with Russia, transiting across Germany in the process. Such actions could potentially amount to assistance in prohibited activities under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, such as transfer and use of cluster munition.

The 2024 Monitor also reports another troubling development: The increase of cluster munition producers, passing from 16 to 17 with the addition of Myanmar.

An international convention joined by two thirds of the world countries

The Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions was adopted on May 30, 2008. It was then opened for signature on December 3-4, 2008, and it officially entered into force on August 1, 2010.

As of today, 123 states (124 before the withdrawal of Lithuania) have committed to the convention's strong and comprehensive norms. This represents over 60% of the world's nations.

A weapon outlawed for a reason

These weapons have been banned because of their catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Cluster munitions can be fired from the ground by artillery, rockets,



missiles, and mortar projectiles, or dropped by aircraft. They open in the air, dispersing multiple submunitions or bomblets over a wide area, without distinguishing between civilian populations and militaries or between civilian and military infrastructure. Moreover, many submunitions fail to explode on initial impact - up to 40% of them - leaving duds that can indiscriminately injure and kill like landmines for years.