

NOTE

Banning Cluster Bombs

Bharat Dogra writes :

With the signing of an important convention recently to ban cluster bombs/munitions, there are high hopes that the success achieved in the case of checking the use of landmines can be repeated in the case of another extremely destructive weapon.

A cluster bomb is a weapon containing multiple explosive submunitions. Cluster munitions consist of containers and submunition. Launched from the ground or air the containers open and disperse bomb-lets over a wide area. Several dozen or even several hundred bomblets can be spread in this way in an area with a radius of up to 600 metres. These contain high explosive power with a lot of capacity for metal fragmentation, increasing the possibility of multiple casualties. Apart from their destructive potential at the time of war, these bomb-lets which spread over a wide area can continue to kill and maim civilian people, including children, for a long time after a war has ended.

According to a document on cluster bombs prepared by the Control Arms Foundation of India, cluster munitions have caused severe problems whenever and wherever these have been used. Nearly every cluster bomb leaves behind a significant amount of hazardous unexploded ordnance. Cluster bombs are much more likely to cause death than injury, making them even more lethal than landmines. According to Handicap International, 98% of the casualties of these weapons are civilian.

34 countries have produced 210 types of cluster munition. These include artillery projectiles, aerially delivered bombs and rockets or missiles that can be delivered by surface or aerial means. India is also among the 34 countries which produce cluster munitions.

On May 30, 2008, an international convention banning cluster munitions was formally adopted by 111 countries. This wide-ranging pact bans the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munition. It also provides for helping victims and cleaning contaminated areas within a decade. This convention was signed in Oslo in December.

The absence of the USA and some other major powers at the convention was troublesome but as Rachael Stohl, senior analyst at the Centre for Defence Information in Washington said, "In the end, the victims of cluster munitions have won-...The fact that these 100 plus countries have been able to come together and develop a convention text signifies that the rest of the world is ready to move forward with international agreements that are pro-humanity."

With the signing of the Convention on Cluster Muniton it is hoped that the destruction caused by cluster munition can be significantly reduced and eventually eliminated. □□□