

80 nations (but not the U.S.) are set to destroy cluster bomb arsenals

Thomas C. Fox | Jun. 24, 2009 NCR Today

Eighty signatories of a new international convention banning cluster bombs are set to meet in Berlin to begin the destruction of these indiscriminate weapons even before the accord has entered into force. On June 25 and 26, delegations from more than 80 countries will meet in the German capital to discuss plans for stockpile destruction.

A cluster bomb, or cluster munition, is a weapon containing multiple - often hundreds - of small explosive submunitions, or bomblets. They are dropped from the air or fired from the ground and designed to break open in mid-air, releasing the submunitions over an area that can be the size of several football fields. This means they cannot discriminate between civilians and soldiers. Also, as many fail to explode on impact, they remain a threat for communities decades after they were dropped.

The United States has resisted efforts by anti-cluster bomb advocates and has not signed the accord.

Since the Convention on Cluster Munitions opened for signature in December 2008 in Oslo, 98 countries have already signed and 10 have ratified it. The treaty will enter into force 6 months after the 30th ratification is deposited at the United Nations in New York. Early initiatives on the implementation of the treaty are very encouraging.

The Convention obliges signatory states to destroy their stockpiles of the weapon as soon as possible but no later than 8 years after entry into force. 31 out of 32 signatories that still possess stockpiles of the weapon are expected to be in Berlin this week showing their willingness to start destruction soon and abide by the treaty deadline. More than a dozen countries have already started - and Spain has even finished - destroying their stockpiles.

"The destruction of these weapons is an illustration of the incredible evolution for many states," said Steve Goose, director of the arms division at Human Rights Watch which co-chairs the CMC. "These weapons were once considered crucial in military arsenals and are now being reduced to inoffensive scrap metal. Every cluster bomb that is destroyed is a cluster bomb that will not kill or maim innocent civilians in the future."

"Cluster bombs have caused an appalling number of casualties," said Lynn Bradach who's son, a US Marine, died in Afghanistan while clearing unexploded cluster bombs. "I hope the United States, the biggest stockpiler in the world, will soon realise that and accept that these horrible weapons belong in destruction facilities, not in military arsenals". Ms Bradach is member of the 'Ban Advocates', a group of people who have been affected by cluster bombs which calls on all governments to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions.