

Indiscriminate Weapons

Cluster bombs are designed as anti-personnel, anti-armor weapons, but the primary victims have been innocent civilians. About 98% of cluster bomb victims are civilians and *one third are children*, who are drawn to the small, toy-like metal objects.¹

Cluster bomb casings release hundreds of bomblets—the size of a soup can or orange—over wide areas, frequently missing intended military targets and killing nearby civilians.

Commonly used cluster bombs are designed to explode into hundreds of pieces of razor-sharp shrapnel that rip through bodies. They are deadlier than land mines.²

Anywhere from 5% to 20% of modern cluster munitions do not detonate upon impact (this rate rises to 30%-50% for older bombs in Indochina), leaving a deadly hazard for years to come.



The Legacy of Cluster Bombs in Laos

Cluster bombs dropped in Laos nearly 40 years ago continue to kill and maim civilians and deprive hundreds of thousands of subsistence-level farmers of the ability to farm their land without the risk of being killed or severely injured.

Cluster bombs hamper basic food production and economic development in Laos, one of the poorest countries in the world.

According to experts in Laos, at current funding levels the cluster bomb removal program will take up to 2000 years to complete, although this time frame extends long past the active life of the ordnance.

Because of the costs associated with clearing unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Laos, more than 99% of the contaminated land remains uncleared.

From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped 2 million tons of ordnance over Laos in 580,000 bombing missions—the equivalent of one planeload every 8 minutes, 24 hours a day, for 9 years.³ At least 260 million cluster bomblets were dropped as part of the bombing campaign.

Up to 30%-50% of the cluster bomblets failed to detonate, leaving 78 to 130 million unexploded bomblets, which contaminate 37% of the land in Laos.⁴

Data from a new survey being completed in Laos indicate that UXO, primarily cluster bombs, have killed or maimed as many as 50,000 civilians since 1964 (34,000 since the end of war in 1973). Each year there continue to be close to 300 hundred new casualties. About 40% of accidents result in death, and *60% of the victims are children*.⁵

Cluster Bombs Around the World - Used in 25 countries, beginning over 40 years ago in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and most recently in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and Georgia.

Recent Use of Cluster Bombs

2008	Russia dropped cluster bombs on Georgia
2006	Israel fired up to 4 million cluster bomblets into Lebanon; the Hezbollah organization fired 4,407 bomblets into Israel
2003	The U.S. dropped 1.8 million cluster bomblets in Iraq
2001-2002	The U.S. dropped 248,056 cluster bomblets over Afghanistan

Hopeful Steps

The Cluster Munitions Convention - In February 2007, 46 countries signed the Oslo Declaration, agreeing to complete an international Cluster Munitions Convention by 2008 to “prohibit the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.” After meeting throughout 2007 and 2008, 95 countries signed the Convention in Oslo, Norway in December 2008 and January 2009. The U.S. was not a party to the Oslo Declaration or the subsequent negotiations, and has announced it will not sign. Interested humanitarian organizations have petitioned the new Obama Administration to reevaluate the U.S. position and sign the treaty. Senators Leahy/Feinstein and Representative McGovern introduced a Joint Resolution in the U.S. Congress in February 2009 calling on the U.S. to sign the international Cluster Munitions Convention. To learn more visit: www.stopclustermunitions.org.

Efforts in Congress - On March 9, 2009, the U.S. Congress approved a permanent ban on the export of cluster munitions with a failure rate greater than one percent. Also, legislation was introduced in March 2009 by Senators Leahy/Feinstein (S. 416) and Representative McGovern (H.R. 981) to permanently restrict U.S. production and use of cluster munitions. To learn more about the U.S. Campaign to Ban Cluster Munitions visit: www.uscbl.org.

What Can You Do?

Contact your Congressional representatives and urge them to support the Joint Resolution calling on the U.S. to sign the Cluster Munitions Convention and S. 416 and H.R. 981 to restrict the production and sale of cluster munitions.

Tell Congress to dramatically increase U.S. spending for clearing UXO in Laos.

- It costs approximately \$1,200 to clear up to one hectare (2.5 acres) of land. As a starting point, the government in Laos has identified 124,270 hectares of high-risk contaminated lands, including areas in and around villages, agricultural lands, and infrastructure. About \$150 million would cover the clearance costs in these areas.⁶
- The U.S. currently gives Laos an average of \$2.9 million a year for UXO removal in comparison to the \$2 million a day for nine years, or \$7 billion, that the government spent bombing Laos.

Visit: www.legaciesofwar.org

1. Handicap International, *Fatal Footprint: The Global Human Impact of Cluster Munitions*, November 2006.
2. Military Analysis Network, “Cluster Bombs,” Federation of American Scientists, available at www.fas.org/man.
3. Senate Congressional Record, May 14, 1975, pg. 14, 266.
4. Handicap International, *op. cit.*
5. Preliminary data from new Lao PDR National Regulatory Authority survey.
6. *Ibid.*
7. U.S. State Department, *To Walk the Earth in Safety*, 2008.