

UN HAILS THE CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS IN LAOS

VIENTIANE, Laos, 9 November 2010—Max Kerley, Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the UN focal point for mine action, expressed his satisfaction with the new Convention on Cluster Munitions during the First Meeting of States Parties in Vientiane, Laos. "This is the most important step for global conventional disarmament since the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty. Cluster munitions have limited military usefulness and cause terrible humanitarian and socio-economic damage."

Cluster munitions were banned due to their indiscriminate impact at the time of use and the long-lasting danger they pose to civilian populations after use. First used in the Second World War, cluster munitions contain dozens of smaller explosives designed to disperse over an area the size of a football field, but often fail to detonate upon impact, creating large de facto minefields.

In the last decades, cluster munitions were used in diverse regions such as South Eastern Europe, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and South East and Central Asia. Over the past six decades cluster munitions have been used in 39 countries and areas by at least 18 countries.

On the ground, the UN is working hard to get rid of submunitions, or "bombies", to teach people how to stay out of harm's way, and to assist the victims of these devices in locations as diverse as Cambodia, Chad, Laos, Lebanon, Tajikistan, Western Sahara, and Zambia.

Max Kerley explained, "The mine action community is all too familiar with the considerable humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental damage caused by unexploded submunitions. They land on roads in orchards and farms. They make land impassable, disrupt livelihoods and prevent aid distribution and resettlement of refugees."

Tremendous efforts by national authorities, NGOs, civil society, the ICRC and the United Nations have already contributed to achieving significant successes in addressing the impact of cluster munitions. For example, UNMAS coordinated mine action programmes in Afghanistan and in Lebanon deal not only with landmines but also with unexploded submunitions used during past conflicts. The formidable work done by UNMAS in addressing the damage caused by cluster munitions in Lebanon in 2006 earned the prestigious UNHCR Nansen Award.

"Let us also acknowledge, the brave mine action workers, who risk their lives on a daily basis to make the land safer in Afghanistan and Sudan, in Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Laos, Kosovo, Lebanon, Eritrea and Ethiopia - indeed, wherever the repugnant remnants of war are taking life and limb," noted UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro during an event at UN Headquarters in October.

“As witnessed here in Vientiane, the Convention continues to generate an enormous amount of positive momentum,” says Mr. Kerley, “We are building on this momentum and calling on all states to support the Convention in order to end the needless loss of innocent lives caused by cluster munitions. We are here in Laos, the country most severely affected by cluster munitions, to emphasize the need for member states to increase support for global efforts to fight this scourge.”

The Convention on Cluster Munitions prohibits the use, production, and trade in cluster munitions, requires assistance to victims of the weapons and provides a framework for donor assistance and cooperation to affected countries. It entered into force on 1 August 2010. A total of 108 nations have signed the convention, 46 of which have now ratified, allowing them to become full states parties to the agreement. According to “Cluster Munition Monitor 2010,” 38 of the nations that have signed the convention are former users, producers, exporters, or stockpilers of the weapon.

UNMAS, a Division within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, was established in 1997 to coordinate United Nations efforts towards a world free from the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions.

For more information on the work of UNMAS, please consult : **www.mineaction.org**

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