

**GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS OF
THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON
THE USE OF CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL
WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE DEEMED TO BE
EXCESSIVELY INJURIOUS OR TO
HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS**

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Explosive remnants of war

Working Group on Explosive Remnants of War

**CLUSTER WEAPONS - A REAL HUMANITARIAN THREAT,
OR AN IMAGINARY ONE?**

Prepared by the Russian Federation

1. Increasingly intensive attempts have been made over the past two or three years to make so-called humanitarian concerns over cluster munitions the subject of separate discussions.
2. We are led to ask whether cluster weapons constitute a real humanitarian threat, or an imaginary one.
3. Which features of these weapons make them more dangerous - if they are more dangerous - and what distinguishes them from traditional unitary munitions?
4. In the broad sense, all weapons contain two main components - means of delivery and means or elements which deliver specific types of power (high-explosive, fragmentation, penetration, etc., including combinations thereof).
5. Viewed from this angle, the overwhelming majority of weapons are "cluster" weapons. What is the difference, for example, between an aircraft carrying dozens or even hundreds of bombs and gravity bombs containing dozens or hundreds of submunitions?
6. Similar relationships apply to any other form of weapon:
 - (i) A multiple launch system and an individual projectile as a component of the system;
 - (ii) A submarine with a set of missiles and an individual missile (torpedo), etc.

7. Those who seek to dramatize the problem put forward a number of arguments:

Argument No. 1: *The destructive components of cluster munitions are dispersed over excessively large distances*

As a rule, the footprint of submunitions is not larger than the area of dispersal of unitary munitions with the same total mass. Since the radius of damage (danger) of an individual submunition is significantly (several times) smaller than that of a unitary munition, the area of damage (danger) of all cluster munitions in practice coincides with their footprint, while, because of the presence of large fragments, the area of danger of a unitary munition of equivalent total mass is three to five times the size of the area of dispersal, reaching a radius of 1,000 to 1,500 metres.

In this way, the use of cluster munitions overall reduces the danger to objects outside the footprint (the area of dispersal of unitary munitions).

Argument No. 2: *Destroying unexploded submunitions is more dangerous than destroying conventional bombs*

Aspects relating to detection:

- (i) Submunitions are as a rule found on the surface;
- (ii) Unitary munitions of typical dimensions have generally penetrated 1 to 10 metres under the surface.

Scope for destruction at the observation site:

- (i) For submunitions, on-site destruction is generally possible owing to their low individual power;
- (ii) For unitary munitions, on-site destruction is generally impossible.

Hazards during transport to the destruction site:

- (i) For submunitions the danger is low;
- (ii) For unitary munitions it is high, owing to the higher probability of design faults as their size increases.

In this way, it is less dangerous overall to deal with the consequences of improper functioning of cluster munitions.

Argument No. 3: *The number of submunitions is too high*

The high level of effectiveness of cluster munitions (cf. argument No. 1) lowers the quantity requirement by a factor of several dozen.

Argument No. 4: *Cluster weapons are least selective*

The principle underlying the use of cluster weapons is that of reducing the power of a single component to the minimum level necessary to destroy the target when the submunition falls directly on the target. Unitary munitions are always designed in the light of the possibility that the target will be struck with the greatest possible error, thus creating superfluous damage in the vicinity of the target.

In this way, the principle underlying cluster weapons, where the power of the submunition is delivered when the target is hit, marks a step along the path from conventional unitary munitions to high-precision weapons.

8. Most of the opinions expressed concerning the greater danger of cluster weapons are based on analysis of practice with the use of obsolete 30-to-50-year-old weapons, which have generally been used without the necessary tactical planning, and sometimes for disposal through destruction, which is in itself immoral.
9. Cluster bombs of the latest generation - glide bombs - simultaneously achieve the two goals of precise delivery of submunitions in the target area and selective strikes against the target. All submunitions in these canisters are equipped with self-destruction systems and are specifically designed for concrete types of action, so that collateral effects are minimized.
10. **Thus the idea that cluster weapons are particularly dangerous has no foundation other than a political one.**
