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Cluster Bomb Ban Reaches Ratification Milestone

Convention to Become Binding International Law on August 1

February 16, 2010

(Washington, DC) - Burkina Faso and Moldova ratified the convention banning cluster munitions on February 16, 2010, the final two ratifications needed for it to become binding international law. The convention will now enter into force on August 1, 2010.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions was opened for signature in December 2008, and it has taken only 15 months to attain the 30 ratifications necessary for it to become binding international law.

"The short time it took to reach this milestone shows that governments have a strong desire never to see these terrible weapons used again," said Steve Goose, arms division director at Human Rights Watch and co-chair of the international Cluster Munition Coalition. "But every signatory needs to ratify, and those who haven't signed need to come on board to keep more civilian lives and limbs from being needlessly lost."

The 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions comprehensively prohibits the use, production, and transfer of cluster munitions, provides strict deadlines for clearing affected areas and destroying stockpiled cluster munitions, and requires assistance to victims of the weapons.

Burkina Faso and Moldova deposited their instruments of ratification with the United Nations in New York today, respectively becoming the 29th and 30th signatories to ratify, and triggering the August 1 date for entry into force.

The 30 states to ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions include leaders of the "Oslo Process" diplomatic initiative, which created the Convention (Norway, Austria, Holy See, Ireland, Mexico, and New Zealand), countries where cluster munitions have been used (Albania, Croatia, Lao PDR, Sierra Leone, and Zambia), stockpilers of cluster munitions (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Moldova, Montenegro, and Slovenia), as well as Spain, the first signatory country to complete destruction of its stockpile. Other ratifying states are: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Luxembourg, Macedonia FYR, Malawi, Malta, Nicaragua, Niger, San Marino, and Uruguay.

"In light of this new international law, it is especially important for former users of the weapon - such as the United States, Russia, and Israel - to re-examine their positions, which put questionable claims of military necessity above the well-documented humanitarian damage cluster munitions cause," Goose said. "Over half of the world's states have agreed to give up cluster munitions. This is no longer an acceptable weapon."

A total of 104 states have signed the convention, including most NATO members and other close US allies. The Bush administration chose not to participate in developing or negotiating



Survivors of cluster munitions and landmines celebrate the creation of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

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Activists and survivors celebrate the creation of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions in Dublin.

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the convention, which was modeled on the 1997 treaty banning antipersonnel landmines. The Obama administration has not yet made its views on the convention known, but President Obama signed a law on March 11, 2009, banning the export of all but a very tiny fraction of the cluster munitions in the US arsenal.

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Steve Goose, arms division director

Cluster munitions have been banned because of their widespread indiscriminate effect at the time of use and the long-lasting danger they pose to civilians. Cluster munitions can be fired by artillery and rocket systems or dropped by aircraft, and typically explode in the air and send dozens, even hundreds, of tiny bomblets over an area the size of a football field. Cluster submunitions often fail to explode on initial impact, leaving duds that act like landmines.

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