



Rt Hon. Margaret Beckett MP
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Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of UNA-UK to register our wholehearted support for Lord Dubs's Private Members Cluster Munitions (Prohibition) Bill proposing to make it an offence to use, develop, store or transfer cluster munitions. Lord Dubs's bill received a second reading in the House of Lords on 15 December 2006 and will now go to Committee stage. If it successfully completes its passage through the House of Lords, we would urge the government to provide adequate time for the bill to be considered and adopted in the House of Commons.

UNA-UK also urges the government to lead efforts to begin negotiations at the United Nations towards the establishment of an international treaty banning cluster munitions.

The devastating humanitarian consequences from the use of cluster munitions are widely recognised. Their military necessity, and thus the justification for their use, is increasingly being questioned. This point was very effectively addressed in the Second Reading debate in the House of Lords by Lords Garden and Ramsbotham, both of them former high-ranking military officers. The continued use of cluster munitions is furthermore leading to their proliferation to non-state actors, as occurred during the recent crisis in Lebanon. We acknowledge that it is necessary to find the right balance between military effectiveness and humanitarian considerations but believe that there are categories of weapons the use of which is unacceptable.

UNA-UK has received a number of letters from its members deploring the civilian casualties caused by the continued use of cluster munitions by the British and other states' militaries, and arguing that the use of the weapon in civilian areas breaches the Geneva Convention's principles of discrimination and proportionality.

UNA-UK was encouraged by the Secretary of State for International Development's Written Answer in the Commons on 23 November 2006, in which he stated that "the UK should play a leading role in pushing for an international commitment to end the use of 'dumb' cluster munitions, phasing out the use of the UK's own dumb munitions, and pressing the military forces of all countries to adhere to their responsibilities under international humanitarian law".

We welcome such steps but, given the grave threat that the cluster weapons pose to civilians, we urge the government to do more. We would ask the government to consider declaring an immediate moratorium on the use of cluster munitions, in line with the position of Norway, and to participate in the International Meeting on Cluster Munitions, to be hosted by the government of Norway in Oslo from 21 to 23 February 2007.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Chair, UNA-UK

cc: Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for International Development