

# The history of a success: UNA-UK's role in securing a cluster munitions ban

**1943**  
Early forms of cluster bombs are first used, by the Soviet Union against Germany and by Germany against Britain during World War II.

**1964-1973**  
UNA-UK condemns the first large-scale use of the weapon, by the US in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic.

**1970s and 1980s**  
The US restricts sales of cluster munitions to Israel in the 1970s, following large-scale civilian casualties in fighting against Syria and Lebanon.  
  
In 1974-1976 states meeting to assess the laws of armed conflict conclude that cluster munitions are 'on the very border-line of humanitarian acceptability'. Sweden proposes a ban and is backed by 12 other states. Negotiations lead to the adoption in 1980 of the UN Convention on Conventional Weapons.  
  
In 1982 the US terminates sales to Israel after attacks on Lebanon. The British use the weapon in the 1980s in the Falklands conflict, as does the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and Morocco in Western Sahara.

**1990s**  
Cluster munitions users proliferate. The US and its allies deploy the weapon in the Gulf War. Cluster munitions are used by Yugoslav and other forces during the Bosnian conflict, and also in Tajikistan, southern Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Chechnya.  
  
**1997**  
The landmine convention is signed by 122 states (158 as of 2008) but cluster munitions are not included.  
  
**1999**  
NATO's deployment of cluster munitions during the Kosovo conflict causes more civilian casualties than any other weapon. President Clinton suspends their use by US forces after a particularly devastating attack.

**2001-03**  
The US deploys the weapon in Afghanistan in 2001-2002. US and UK forces use cluster bombs during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, where they kill and maim more civilians than any other weapon.

**2006**  
**July-August**  
The UN's humanitarian chief calls Israel's use of the weapon in southern Lebanon 'completely immoral', with 90 per cent of strikes taking place after the ceasefire had been agreed. The conflict draws attention to the weapon's horrific post-conflict impacts and catalyses states to seek an international ban.  
  
**December**  
The Norwegian government announces that it will host a meeting in Oslo in early 2007 aimed at launching diplomatic negotiations towards a treaty banning cluster munitions.



**2007**

**16 January**  
UNA-UK Chair Lord Hannay writes to Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett urging the government to give its full support to the so-called 'Oslo process'. UNA-UK members follow this up with letters to MPs.

**23 January**  
UNA-UK receives a reply from the Foreign Secretary. She says the government shares UNA-UK's concern about the weapon's humanitarian impacts and confirms the UK's attendance at the Oslo conference.

**22 February**  
The inaugural conference of the Oslo process takes place. Attended by 49 states and many NGOs and UN bodies, the meeting concludes with 46 countries, including the UK, endorsing the Oslo Declaration – a commitment to conclude by 2008 a new legally binding instrument that prohibits 'the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians'.

**24 February**  
The UK government's decision to sign the Oslo Declaration is labelled a 'U-turn' by the *Independent*.

**26 February**  
UNA-UK joins the Cluster Munion Coalition (CMC) – a global network of around 300 NGOs campaigning for a comprehensive ban.

**20 March**  
Defence Secretary Des Browne announces that the UK will immediately cease all use of so-called 'dumb' cluster munitions.

**1 April**  
New World features a briefing note outlining UNA-UK's concern over the misleading distinction between different models of the weapon, and calls attention to the humanitarian risks of so-called 'smart' bombs.

**13-15 April**  
UNA-UK Annual Conference agrees a policy resolution objecting to the government's retention of 'smart' cluster munitions.

**23-25 May**  
28 new states join the Oslo process at the second meeting, hosted by Peru in Lima.

**5 November**  
UNA-UK staff and members participate in the CMC's UK day of action against cluster munitions and add their names to a giant signature board.

**5-7 December**  
Diplomatic momentum towards a ban picks up at the third Oslo process meeting, hosted by Austria in Vienna. On the eve of the conference Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voices UN backing for the treaty, noting the 'high humanitarian, human rights and developmental stakes' involved. Tim Kellow attends the conference as a member of the CMC's delegation, and lobbies many developing country delegates to sign up to the treaty.

**17 December**  
An early day motion authored by UNA-UK is tabled by Martin Caton MP and receives 75 signatures. EDM 602 expresses concern that the UK and other stockpiler countries 'are seeking to water down the treaty by introducing an exemption for cluster munitions that have self-destruct mechanisms'.

**2008**

**1 January**  
New World features an article outlining challenges for negotiations on the ban and encourages members to write to their MPs to urge them to sign EDM 602.

**18-22 February**  
New Zealand hosts the fourth Oslo process meeting in Wellington. Over 100 states sign the Wellington Declaration, committing them to participate in the final negotiations at a key conference in Dublin in May. Delegates also agree a framework text for the treaty.

**28-30 March**  
UNA-UK Annual Conference agrees a policy resolution urging the UK to work in good faith towards a treaty 'with no distinctions or reservations between different categories of cluster munitions'. UNA-UK members sign a CMC petition calling on the UK to support such a ban.

**2 April**  
Lord Hannay writes to Foreign Secretary David Miliband to relay the Annual Conference resolution. UNA-UK members write to their MPs, urging them to call on the government to ensure that the treaty is not watered down.

**19 April**  
UNA-UK holds the UK's headline event to mark the CMC's global day of action to ban cluster munitions. Hosted by Central Region UNA in Birmingham, the meeting features presentations from Tim Kellow and Landmine Action's Richard Moyes. More signatures are collected for the CMC petition.

**28 April**  
Lord Hannay and other leading UK CMC members hand over the petition to the Foreign Secretary. It boasts more than 30,000 signatures, many from UNA-UK members.

**16 May**  
The Foreign Secretary responds to Lord Hannay's 2 April letter, reaffirming the UK's commitment to achieving an international ban at the Dublin conference.

**19 May**  
As delegates gather in Dublin for the final Oslo Process meeting, *The Times* publishes a letter by nine former British commanders warning the government that 'to choose a course that seeks to exempt the UK's remaining stocks from a ban risks creating loopholes that others will inevitably exploit. Most importantly it will not achieve the stigmatisation of cluster munitions, which must be our objective if we are to prevent the proliferation of these weapons'. UNA-UK's Tim Kellow attends the conference as part of the CMC delegation.

**30 May**  
107 states agree the new treaty. The ban is categorical, with no transition periods or exceptions allowed. Prime Minister Gordon Brown plays a key role with a last-minute intervention announcing the UK's support for a total ban.  
  
Lord Hannay writes to the Foreign Secretary, copying in the Secretaries of State for Defence and International Development, to congratulate the UK for helping to secure the treaty. The letter also urges the government now to 'throw its full weight behind efforts to achieve the maximum support for the convention by other governments and the largest possible number of signatories to the convention'. A UNA-UK press statement is also issued.

**26 June**  
The Foreign Secretary responds, praising UNA-UK's advocacy for the ban and stating the government's intention to encourage other states to support the new convention.

**3 December**  
The convention opens for signature in Oslo. It will enter into force once it has been ratified by 30 countries.