

Cluster Bomb Fact Sheet

(References at the end of document)

Indiscriminate Weapons

- Cluster bombs are designed as anti-personnel, anti-armor weapons, but the primary victims have been innocent civilians. More than 95% of known cluster bomb victims are civilians and 40 percent are children, who are drawn to the small, toy-like metal objects(a) (c).
- Cluster bomb casings release hundreds of bomblets—the size of a soup can or orange—over wide areas, frequently missing intended military targets and killing nearby civilians.
- Commonly used cluster bombs are designed to explode into hundreds of pieces of razor-sharp shrapnel that rip through bodies. They are deadlier than landmines.

The Legacy of Cluster Bombs in Laos

- From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped over 2 million tons of ordnance over Laos in 580,000 bombing missions, the equivalent of one planeload every 8 minutes, 24 hours a day, for 9 years. At least 270 million cluster bomblets were dropped as part of the bombing campaign; up to 80 million failed to detonate.(c)
- Data from a new survey completed in Laos in 2009 indicate that UXO, primarily cluster bombs, have killed or maimed as many as 50,000 civilians in Laos since 1964 (and 20,000 since 1974, after the war ended). Over the past two decades there have been close to 300 hundred new casualties each year. About 40% of accidents result in death, and 40% of the victims are children. Boys are particularly at risk. (c)

Consider the Following:

- At least one third of Laos is contaminated with UXO based on surveys and U.S. military strike data. Given the sheer magnitude of the problem, it is infeasible to clear all of the land. The Lao government is targeting populated areas and agricultural lands for clearance. Even with substantial increases in funding, the effort will take at least 15 years and most likely much longer. (i)
- Over the past four decades, only a tiny fraction of the bomblets that failed to detonate have been cleared. All 17 provinces in Laos, and 41 of 46 of the poorest districts in Laos, are burdened with unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination.(c)(d also)
- Over the past four decades, only 500,000 of the estimated 80 million bomblets that failed to detonate have been cleared. (f)
- Over the past 16 years the U.S. has contributed on average \$3.2 million a year, or \$51 million in total, for UXO clearance, risk education and victim assistance.(e) This is in contrast to the \$17 million a day (2010 dollars), for nine years, the U.S. spent bombing Laos, for a total of \$56 billion. (h)

Hopeful Steps

- *The Convention on Cluster Munitions* - prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions. The international agreement, signed by 108 nations and ratified by 51 to date, entered into force on August 1, 2010. The U.S. has not signed the treaty. The first meeting of the State Parties to the Convention took place November 9-12, 2010, in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

Efforts in Congress and Beyond

- House/Senate Bill: The Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act of 2011 (S 558, HR 996) awaits passage in Congress. This bill would restrict the production and use of cluster munitions by the U.S. A permanent ban on cluster bomb *exports* from the U.S. was passed in the Senate in March 2009.
- 2010 U.S. Budget: The United States Congress directed that “not less than \$5 million shall be made available for unexploded ordnance removal in Laos,” which represented a sizable increase in funding for UXO removal in Laos over FY2009. The Congress also directed the State Department “to plan for similar or higher funding levels for these purposes in subsequent fiscal years, similar to that proposed by the Senate.”
- A House Appropriations Subcommittee held the first ever hearing on the issue of UXO in Laos in April 2010, helping to educate members of Congress on the issue and increase support for additional funding for UXO clearance in Laos.
- Former U.S. ambassadors to Laos sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on July 15, 2010 asking for a dramatic increase of funding for UXO removal in Laos.
- Safe Path Forward Strategic Plan II provides comprehensive and coordinated between the government, NGOs and citizens to address this problem and make significant outcomes over the next 5 to 10 years.

What Can You Do?

- Encourage your Congressional representative and the U.S. State Department to attend future meetings related to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Ask the U.S. to join this convention and make a long-term commitment to clearance and victim assistance in Laos.
- Urge your Congressional representative to ensure that at least \$7 million is allocated for UXO clearance in Laos for FY2011 with substantial additional increases over the next ten years. \$7 million would represent a modest but important increase over previous funding levels, and

subsequent increases to \$10 million per year over the next 10 years are necessary to adequately address the UXO problem in Laos.

References

(a) Handicap International, *Fatal Footprint: The Global Human Impact of Cluster Munitions*, [http://www.mineaction.org/downloads/1/Fatal Footprint HI report on CM casualties.1.pdf](http://www.mineaction.org/downloads/1/Fatal_Footprint_HI_report_on_CM_casualties.1.pdf) (November 2006).

-see p.42 of this document for percentage of civilian casualties.

(b)

(c) National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action in the Lao PDR, *The Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Problem and Operational Progress in the Lao PDR: Official Figures*, <http://www.nra.gov.la/resources/Official%20UXO%20Statistic/UXO%20Sector%20Official%20Statistics%20-%20signed.pdf>, (June 2, 2010) We have this document in our files. Also can see website: <http://www.nra.gov.la/uxoproblem.html>

(d) "Indochina War Statistics - Dollars and Deaths", Congressional Record, May 14 1975, pp. 14262-66.

(e) US Department of State, *Saving Lives in Laos (...)*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/11/150696.htm>, (November 2010)

-this page indicates that the US has contributed \$51 million for UXO clearance in Laos since 1993

(f) Phonsavanh Vongsay and Gao Kuangyun, *UXO Agency aims to halve accident rates*, Vientiane Times, <http://www.rtm.org.la/documents/RTM%202010%20documents/Press%20Releases/Vientiane%20Times%202011%20October%202010%20page%201%20-%20UXO%20SWG.pdf> (October 11, 2010)

-see direct quote from head of the NRA who says that there are about 80 million bombies while only 500,000 have been cleared.

(g) State department funding requests: FY11: 1.9 million FY12: 5million FY13: 4 million
These numbers were given to us in an email from a State Department official on June 8, 2011

(h) On the cost of the war, 1964-1973, the starting point is the Congressional Record of May 14th 1975. The figure derived from the CR is about \$2.8 million per day. We got hold of the annual figures for inflation for the period 1968 (taken as the mid-year of the war) to 2009 and calculated the annual value of that figure in today's US\$, and it came to about \$17 million (the inflator from 1968 to 2008 is about 6.2). The air war proper started in June 1964, and finished in July 1973, so that it lasted 9 years.
 $9 \times 365 \times \$17,000,000 = \$55,845,000,000$ – so, about \$56 billion.

(i) National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action in the Lao PDR, *Safe Path Forward II: National Strategic Plan for the UXO Sector in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2010 – 2020*, http://www.nra.gov.la/resources/UXO%20Sector%20Strategy/SPFII%20%20Eng_4%20May%202010%20Draft.pdf (November 2009)