

# Ban U.S. Cluster Bombs

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## Discussion Guide for “Bombies”

### *What’s being done now to clean up the mess in Laos?*

In Laos today there are nearly 1,000 people working full-time in 9 different provinces, doing bomb clearance and public education in order to reduce the threat caused by cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war.

According to the State Department, from 1993-2007 the United States has been the largest financial contributor to these efforts—spending nearly \$42 million (or \$2.8 million per year on average). While this is true, it is also true that the United States spent an average of \$2 million *a day* for 9 years bombing Laos.

The State Department plans to cut its support for demining work to \$1.4 million in 2008. According to the United Nations Development Program, at current funding levels the cluster bomb removal program in Laos may take up to 100 years to complete.

### *Is Laos an isolated case? Have other countries been severely affected by cluster bombs?*

No, Laos is not an isolated case—25 other countries are affected by cluster bombs as well. Most recently, Lebanon was bombarded by Israel with cluster munitions in August 2006 and has an estimated 1 million bomblets still on the ground. Laos is unique in the sheer quantity of cluster bombs remaining to be cleaned up—10-25 million bomblets in a country of less than 7 million people.

### *What’s being done to prevent another Laos?*

Not enough. Despite clear evidence of civilian casualties every time cluster bombs are used, the U.S. still claims that the military utility of these weapons outweighs the humanitarian impact. In the last decade alone, the U.S. used cluster bombs in Serbia/Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, and U.S.-exported weapons were used in Lebanon.

There is progress. The Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act (S.594/H.R.1755) was introduced in 2007 and is gathering co-sponsors. The bill would: 1) prevent use of U.S. cluster bombs in civilian-populated areas, and 2) require that all cluster bombs used or exported have a “dud rate” of less than 1%. In late 2007, Congress passed part of this law, in the form of a 1 year moratorium on cluster bomb exports during 2008.

### *What about the rest of the world? The U.S. isn’t the only cluster bomb user, exporter and stockpiler, is it?*

No, the U.S. is one of 34 countries that produce cluster bombs and one of 14 countries that has used them. The U.S. does stand out in how many cluster bomblets it stockpiles

(nearly 1 billion), to how many countries it has exported them (29) and in how many countries it has used them (8).

And while the U.S. continues to insist upon the military utility of these antiquated weapons, the rest of the world is moving toward a global treaty to ban them. More than 100 countries finalized a treaty in late May, 2008 banning production, use and export of cluster munitions. The treaty requires all signatories to it to destroy all of their cluster munitions within 8 years, to clear cluster submunition-littered land, and to provide adequate assistance to their citizens and communities that are affected by cluster munitions. This treaty will open for signature in December. Among the governments that took part in the negotiations were all of the United States' closest military allies in NATO and in Asia-Pacific (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines). For more information on the international treaty process, go to: <http://www.clusterprocess.org/>

***Who is working on Laos and cluster bombs? Where else can I turn for information?***

- Friends Committee on National Legislation: [www.banclusterbombs.org](http://www.banclusterbombs.org)
- Handicap International: [www.handicap-international.us/](http://www.handicap-international.us/)
- Legacies of War: [www.legaciesofwar.org](http://www.legaciesofwar.org)
- Mines Advisory Group: [www.mag.org.uk](http://www.mag.org.uk)
- Mennonite Central Committee: [www.mcc.org/clusterbombs](http://www.mcc.org/clusterbombs)
- U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines: [www.uscbl.org](http://www.uscbl.org)



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Friends Committee on National Legislation • 245 Second St., NE • Washington, DC 20002 • (800) 630-1330