

# Key points for writing letters about cluster bombs to MPs and Ministers

## What has the UK done?

- February 2007: The UK government attended a conference on cluster bombs in Norway and agreed to work towards an international prohibition on the weapons by 2008 (see Oslo Declaration sheet) – precisely what will be prohibited and what will be allowed is still to be negotiated.
- March 2007: The UK announced that they would no longer use two out of the four types of cluster bombs stockpiled by the UK military (the BL755 and the M26).

However,

## Self-destruct?

- The UK has kept their stocks of Israeli-made M85 submunitions to use.
- They claim this is because the M85 submunition does not cause problems for civilians as it has a self-destruct mechanism. This is supposed to mean that they will not be left on the ground to be found accidentally.

## “Smart” and “Dumb”?

- The UK government has said that the two cluster bombs they have stopped using – the air delivered BL755 and the ground launched (used in multiple launch rocket systems – MLRS) M26 are “dumb” cluster bombs as they do not have self destruct mechanisms.
- This distinction between “smart” and “dumb” cluster bombs has been made up by the UK government in order to separate the cluster bomb they would like to keep (M85 and so-called “Hydra” rockets) from the ones they are willing to give up.
- The “smart” and “dumb” distinctions are not used or recognised by organisations clearing cluster bombs or campaign groups seeking to protect civilians from the effects of the weapons, or indeed any other governments.

## Evidence

There is lots of evidence from NGOs such as Landmine Action and Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) to prove that a self-destruct mechanism is not enough to protect civilians from being injured or killed by cluster bombs:

1. Landmine Action report “Foreseeable Harm”, published in 2006 following the conflict in Lebanon in which many different types of cluster bombs were used, includes photographs of unexploded M85 bomblets which could not have been taken if the bomblets had exploded on impact or self-destructed.
2. John Rodsted/NPA film. Also made in Lebanon after the conflict in 2006. This film shows filmmaker and photographer, John Rodsted finding significant numbers of unexploded M85 bomblets in fields in Lebanon. Search for “M85 cluster” on YouTube to see this film.
3. United Nations clearance workers reported that they were finding large numbers of unexploded M85 bomblets. In fact, they may well be more dangerous as they have two different ways to explode and injure someone.

Tekimiti Gilbert, Head of Operations at the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre in Southern Lebanon said, in November 2006:

“We can state categorically that we are finding large numbers of unexploded M85 submunitions that have failed to detonate as designed and failed to self-destruct afterwards. In effect these submunitions have failed twice. These M85 submunitions are even more dangerous than other types because the self-destruct mechanism makes them more problematic to deal with and where ever possible they are destroyed in situ.”

### **Key points for letters to MPs and Ministers**

- Cluster bombs are a humanitarian problem because they are very dangerous to civilians both at the time of use and long after.
- The UK’s decision to agree to the Oslo Declaration (Feb 2007) and subsequent ban on two types of cluster bombs (Mar 2007) should be congratulated. However their decision to keep the M85 is unacceptable.
- The UK’s decision to keep their M85 submunitions shows that their actions are not led by concern about protection of civilians.
- Trying to separate “dumb” and “smart” cluster bombs does not make sense.
- There is substantial proof that the M85 bomblets with self-destruct mechanisms often fail to work, making them as “dumb” as any other type of cluster bomb.

#### **What should be done:**

- The UK government should protect civilians by removing all of its cluster bombs from service and take a leading role within the Oslo Process started in February 2007 to create the strongest possible international treaty to ban these weapons.

Request that:

#### *MPs*

- sign Early Day Motion 1663 ‘M85 cluster submunitions’ dated 11 June 2007 and 1501 ‘Cluster munitions’ dated 17 May 2007
- write to the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, the calling for him to undertake the actions outlined below

#### *Ministers*

- explain how they can reconcile the government’s decision to retain the M85 with it’s stated concern for the protection of civilians, given evidence of its poor performance in combat conditions;
- support the immediate withdrawal from service of the M85 submunition;
- ensure the UK takes a leading role within the Oslo Process to achieve the strongest possible treaty banning cluster munitions.

Letters to Ministers and MPs can be sent **c/o House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.**