

U.S. Military Calls Off Plan to Ban Use of Cluster Bombs



Washington, December 7 (RHC)-- The U.S. military has called off a planned 2019 ban on using certain cluster bombs, which release explosive sub-munitions, or bomblets. The Department of Defense said the U.S. military considers cluster bombs a legitimate and important weapon, and warded off criticism which said cluster bombs kill indiscriminately and pose hazards to civilians.

"The Department of Defense has determined that cluster munitions remain a vital military capability in the tougher warfighting environment ahead of us, while still a relatively safe one," Pentagon spokesman Tom Crossen said in a statement.

U.S. officials told Reuters that safety improvements in munitions technology failed to advance enough to replace existing stockpiles with safer weaponry. "Although the Department seeks to field a new generation of more highly reliable munitions, we cannot risk mission failure or accept the potential of increased military and civilian casualties by forfeiting the best available capabilities," according to a Pentagon memo seen by Reuters.

Cluster bombs are banned under the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), an international treaty that addresses the humanitarian consequences and unacceptable harm caused to civilians by cluster munitions through a categorical prohibition and a framework for action. The weapons can contain dozens of smaller bomblets, dispersing over vast areas, often killing and maiming civilians long after they are

dropped.

The convention bans all use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster bombs. More than 100 countries have signed on to the treaty, but the United States has not.

The new Pentagon policy drew immediate criticism. Human Rights Watch said there is no compelling reason for the use of cluster munitions. "We condemn this decision to reverse the long-held U.S. commitment not to use cluster munitions that fail more than 1 percent of the time, resulting in deadly unexploded sub-munitions," said Mary Wareham, arms division director at Human Rights Watch.

According to reports, the United States has also provided "thinly-veiled cover" for the use of cluster bombs by Saudi Arabia and its allies in their military aggression against Yemen, saying that cluster bombs were "permissible" as legitimate weapons of war if "used appropriately."

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