



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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November 21, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge you to have the United States join the Convention on Cluster Munitions which opens for signature on December 3, 2008 in Oslo, Norway. This Convention, adopted by over 100 nations in May 2008, prohibits the use, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions and sets guidelines for destruction of existing stockpiles of these weapons. The Convention also includes obligations to assist victims of cluster munitions. Our Conference is grateful that the U.S. supports demining but now is the time for the U.S. to support a Convention which would prevent the placement of these mines and munitions in the first place.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stands with the Holy See in its call to address the harmful effects of cluster munitions. This commitment flows from the Church's teaching on the protection of human life and dignity. On the eve of the May 2008 conference on cluster munitions, Pope Benedict XVI called for "a strong and credible international instrument" to ban these lethal devices. The Vatican representative to this meeting, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, said, "Decades after the utilisation of cluster munitions, peace preserves a bitter taste with thousands of victims, socio-economic development stifled, considerable human and financial resources wasted." Earlier in 2006, the Holy See declared, "The disastrous humanitarian impact of failed cluster bomb 'duds' needs no further demonstration... Their victims can be counted by the million, the regions affected continue to be prohibited to displaced persons for years after the end of wars, nor can they be used by the inhabitants."

As in the case of landmines, the Conference has long supported legislation that would restrict the export of existing stockpiles of cluster munitions and their use in civilian areas. The Convention on Cluster Munitions would do so. Having the U.S. sign this Convention is the right thing to do and will strengthen the moral standing of our nation in the world.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace