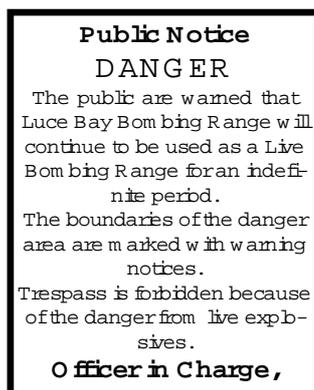


## CLEARING UP CLUSTER BOMBS?

Just a few weeks ago, on 28th November, The Galloway Gazette (covering south-west Scotland) published a tiny advert in its Classified section:



Being used as a "Live Bombing Range" involves the testing of US weapons of mass destruction, and it's happening in Scotland because the same tests are banned from taking place on US soil under US Federal Law. This is the sort of "special relationship" we have with the US. Weapons tested at West Freugh (Luce Bay) include Cluster Bombs.

A couple of weeks after this notice appeared, United Nations members (that includes the UK and US) were in Geneva gearing up for the Third Meeting of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). Human Rights Watch (HRW) [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) issued a statement calling for "moratoria on the use, production, and transfer of Cluster Munitions until the humanitarian problems can be addressed. Some NGOs have called for a permanent prohibition on use of Cluster Munitions."

The HRW statement goes on to list sixteen countries where Cluster Munitions have been used: Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Russia (Chechnya), Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) and Vietnam. Peace campaigners in Scotland suggest that the UK should also be on this list. Dan Kenny, of Galloway Coalition: "This clean-up of cluster bombs should also include the Battlefield of Galloway... specifically Luce Bay... which has been used by the US military for over twenty years... to test their weapons of mass destruction..."

The wheels of the United Nations turn ever so slowly. Back in March, the 92-nation treaty agreed in principle to "mark and clear, remove or destroy explosive remnants of war in affected territories under its control." When the latest meeting concluded, the UN Press Release (Dec. 13th 2003) read as follows:

*"The Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) concluded today with States parties confirming their commitment to take further action with the aim of strengthening the Convention and agreeing on follow-up work for its Group of Governmental Experts in 2003. The session adopted the report of the Group of Governmental Experts, which recommends a mandate for two*

*respective working groups, namely on the issue of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), and the issue of mines other than anti-personnel mines (MOTAPM)."*

To me this sounds like more prevarication - a Group of Governmental Experts recommending two working groups to investigate ERW and MOTAPM. I can't recall ever speaking to anyone who thought that bombs which get left around after wars and kill innocent people, mainly children, are a good idea. Here are some of the basic facts about Cluster Bombs.

As Cluster Bombs drop from planes, they spin at speeds of up to 2,500 revolutions per minute. At a pre-programmed height, which can be between from a few hundred to several thousand feet, the casing of the bomb splits open, scattering bomblets over a large area. The higher they are when they open, the wider the scatter of the bomblets. A typical Cluster Bomb will spread bomblets over an area the size of eight football pitches. Small inflatable tails on the bomblets ensure they land nose-down. These bomblets contain an explosive charge which can penetrate 7" thick armour. They also contain an incendiary device to start fires. The casing is designed to fragment into hundreds of tiny pieces of shrapnel to hit "soft targets", which of course means people, often children. Bomblets can be set to explode before or on impact, but there is a high failure rate, meaning that many are left lying around unexploded for unsuspecting civilians to discover. Bomblets look like soft drinks cans and there is confusion between bomblets and US air-dropped food parcels, with many resulting fatalities and horrific injuries.

Dan Kenny of Galloway Coalition, who as a Flight Sergeant was involved in bomb disposal for the RAF from 1939 onwards offers some more background information and a novel suggestion for clearing up Cluster Bombs in Scotland:

*"The USA Cluster Bomb is a re-hash of the Luftwaffe Cluster "Butterfly" Bombs dropped firstly on RAF Station Wattisham, Norfolk, 1939... The Butterfly... [on] the slightest movement exploded, spreading hundreds of razor sharp slivers of shrapnel, cutting personnel to ribbons, the first being three flight sergeants... When I see shattered bodies on TV my fury knows no bounds even after 63 years since my very dear friends were chopped to pieces... Blair, Straw, Hoon... should be forced to come to Galloway and clear all the weapons of mass destruction from West Freugh."*

We can only hope that a total ban on Cluster Bombs results from this Convention, but the UN are clearly going to take their time about this while people continue to be killed or maimed.

It is up to us to keep up pressure on our government and the UN to get these weapons banned and existing affected areas, including Scotland, cleaned up as soon as possible.



Exploded Cluster Bomblet