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The U.K. Completes Destruction of Stockpiled Cluster Munitions

On 19 December 2013, the U.K. announced that it destroyed its last cluster munition, a Multiple Launch Rocket System M26 basic tactical rocket, at a weapons demilitarization facility in Casalborino, Italy. In doing so, it became the 17th States Party to the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* (CCM) to complete its Article 3 obligations on stockpile destruction.^{1,2} In addition to stockpile destruction, the CCM also requires clearance of cluster-munition remnants and assistance for victims.



An unexploded M85 type cluster submunition.
Photo courtesy of Stéphanie De Greef.


More than 190,000 cluster munitions and nearly 39 million submunitions—the entirety of the U.K.'s arsenal—were destroyed more than five years ahead of the convention's mandated timeline. The U.K. signed the CCM on 3 December 2008 and ratified it 4 May 2010. It became a State Party on 1 November 2010.¹

Great Britain's stockpile included a variety of bombs, rockets, projectiles and submunitions, including the M85, M77 and M42 type. The estimated cost of the weapon's destruction was £40 million (US\$65,336,000 as of 7 Feb 2014).³ Additionally, its latest Article 7 progress report indicated that the country had no immediate plans to acquire and retain submunitions for permitted purposes but reserved the right to do so.⁴

A week prior to the December announcement, a report published by the Dutch peace group IKV Pax Christi indicated that nine U.K. financial institutions, including the Royal Bank of Scotland, were still providing £1.1 billion (US\$1,795,860,000 as of 7 Feb 2014) in financial services to companies producing cluster bombs. Although the U.K. ratified the CCM in 2010, legislation has not prohibited British financial institutions from investing in cluster-bomb production.⁵

Nevertheless, Thomas Nash, director of Article 36, a U.K. not-for-profit watchdog organization, was quoted as saying, "[w]hen this campaign started in 2003, nobody would have believed you if you had said that in ten years the UK, one of the major users of cluster bombs, would have banned the weapon and destroyed every last one of them. It shows what is possible and what can be overcome when governments and organisations work together for a humanitarian purpose."⁶

According to Article 36, the U.K., a former producer of the weapon, used cluster munitions as late as 2003 in Iraq, as well as the former Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) in 1999, Iraq and Kuwait in 1991, and the Falkland Islands in 1982.⁶

Stockpile destruction, according to the Cluster Munitions Coalition (CCM), has been one of the convention's early success stories. Fifty percent of the States Parties with stockpiles completed their Article 3 obligations, which roughly equates to more than one million cluster munitions and 122 million submunitions destroyed by States Parties—a significant accomplishment considering the CCM entered into force just over three years ago in August 2010.¹ 

~ by Dane Sosniecki, CISR staff

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