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Cluster bombs were used in the Gulf and Kosovo conflicts

By **BBC defence correspondent Jonathan Marcus**

Disarmament campaigners are calling for a global moratorium on the manufacture and use of cluster bombs.

The danger and destruction caused by cluster bombs dropped from Nato and British aircraft is outlined in a report by the UK Working Group on Landmines - a coalition of organisations that work in war zones in the aftermath of conflict.

Cluster bombs, widely used in the Gulf and Kosovo, are dropped from aircraft, opening to scatter up to 150 bomblets over a wide area.

They are typically used in attacks against vehicles or troops in entrenched positions but many do not explode on impact, and present a long-term hazard to civilians trying to return to their homes or farmland.

Moratorium

Director of the UK Working Group on Landmines Richard Lloyd says around 200 people in Kosovo alone have been killed or injured by cluster bomb munitions in the past year.

The group played an important part in securing a world-wide moratorium on the manufacture, stock-piling and use of anti-personnel landmines.

Campaigners now want to see a similar moratorium on cluster munitions.

The report published on Tuesday suggests that cluster bombs are far less reliable than their makers suggest, especially when

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John Spellar,
Defence minister
"The report itself
doesn't actually
say they should
be barred"

real **28k**

dropped from higher altitudes.

Military awareness

Nato governments and their military commanders generally insist that cluster bombs remain an effective and useful weapon in certain circumstances.

But there is a growing awareness in military circles of the need to minimise so-called "collateral damage", or civilian casualties, in the sorts of limited operations that have become typical of deployments in recent years.

The Royal Air Force in the UK, for example, says is not going to remove cluster bombs from its inventory.

However, it has already ordered more accurate anti-armour weapons that can be precisely targeted against specific vehicles in order to reduce civilian casualties as far as possible.

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