

Social Justice Spotlight

Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst
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*The Social Justice Spotlight is a piece written monthly by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Spotlight comes to us from **Chad Johnson**.*

More than 80 countries signed a treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, in Oslo, Norway last December. The Foreign Ministers of Britain, Australia, Canada, France and Germany – all fighting alongside U.S. troops in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan – signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Even Afghanistan agreed to sign. The United States was not there in accordance with the Bush administration's refusal to join the majority of the world's nations in stopping the use of these weapons, which kill or maim civilians and children.

President Obama has said he supports initiatives to minimize civilian casualties from conventional weapons, including cluster bombs. An Obama spokesperson said that "the president-elect will carefully review the new treaty and work closely with our friends and allies to ensure that the United States is doing everything feasible to promote protection of civilians."

Cluster munitions are fired from aircraft or artillery and spay small "bomblets" over an expanse the size of two football fields. Many do not explode on impact but remain in fields and parks as landmines, waiting to be found by unsuspecting civilians. Many of the unexploded munitions look like harmless objects, such as toys or cans of food.

The United States has been the world's largest producer, stockpiler and user of cluster munitions. It has used them in civilian-populated areas of three countries in the past decade, and the millions of cluster bombs that the United States dropped in Laos in the early 1970s are still killing and wounding people.

A Social Justice Committee-sponsored letter-writing event after the service December 28 produced 15 letters to President-elect Obama urging him to authorize an eminent U.S. Government representative, e.g., Clinton, Gates, to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions at an early date. The Committee hopes that numerous additional members and friends of the Society would send such letters to the President.