

Humanitarian concerns stall cluster bomb accord

by [John Zarocostas](#) in the [January 11, 2012](#) issue

Religious leaders and disarmament campaigners hailed the decision in Geneva by 50 countries to derail a proposal backed by the United States, Russia, China, India and Israel to create a new global accord on cluster bombs, contending that it did not meet humanitarian concerns.

The proposal, put forth during the Fourth Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which ended November 25, called for the destruction of all cluster munitions produced before 1980. However, it would have allowed the use of munitions with a failure rate of 1 percent or less, as well as those with only one safeguard mechanism.

"The bottom line is the use of these weapons would have continued in some form, and we look to the day when these weapons are banned," said Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent representative to the UN.

A cluster bomb releases smaller bomblets designed to kill enemy personnel and damage vehicles and enemy munitions. The Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions, enacted in 2008 and ratified by 111 countries, imposed a comprehensive ban on cluster bombs and mandated the destruction of existing stockpiles.

Despite changes introduced by the U.S. in the last hour of the two-week conference, representatives from many countries said the draft proposal did not "address fundamental human concerns," in addition to allowing for continued production and use of cluster munitions.

"It is so important that we take all necessary measures to eliminate these weapons; this is of great responsibility for any humanitarian organization. This is the way we express our love by taking care of our neighbor," said Tony D'Costa, general secretary of Pax Christi Ireland.

"The bar set by the Oslo Convention is really high, and we have to continue to persuade other countries to come up to that level, including the big powers," said D'Costa. The five countries that supported the failed CCW proposal have not signed the Oslo Convention.

Steffen Kongstad, Norway's representative at the conference and one of the original architects of the Oslo Convention, said asking other parties in the CCW to endorse continued use of weapons that were well documented to have serious and unacceptable humanitarian consequences "was a bit too much." —ENInews