

Open Letter to President Joseph R. Biden and to his National Security team

Mr. President,

It is with a sense of dismay and disappointment that the undersigned learned that your administration has decided to supply cluster munitions to the Ukraine military. The rationale for this step is that Ukraine was running out of artillery ammunition at a crucial point in its counteroffensive and these cluster munitions would seriously hamper Russian military operations. While we fully endorse U.S. support for the valiant people of Ukraine in their fight against Russian aggression, this decision reverses a long standing commitment on the part of the United States not to furnish cluster munitions to other countries. Moreover, it is completely inconsistent with commendable U.S. and NATO condemnation of Russia's own use of cluster munitions in its war of aggression against Ukraine.

Having served under successive administrations as U.S. envoys to Cambodia, a country that still suffers from mines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO), we have witnessed firsthand the economic damage and human toll inflicted by unexploded cluster munitions decades after their employment. During the Vietnam War, in the 1960s and 1970s, millions of cluster munitions were dropped on Cambodia, mostly in the east and northeast of the country. As a result of this use, year after year, the people of Cambodia have suffered, with death and dismemberment a fact of life in many rural areas. The majority of the casualties from these pernicious munitions are children. Over the past two decades, the United States has spent over \$130 million to locate and neutralize UXO in Cambodia, and it's reported that we've committed to providing over \$6 million for demining efforts until 2025. In the meantime, UXO continue to kill and injure some 100 people per year in Cambodia.

Now we witness yet another region at war. The United States and its NATO allies seek to support Ukraine in its efforts to repel the Russian invader, a support we commend and endorse. But our witness to the damage that cluster munitions continue to cause the people of Cambodia, decades after the end of the war tells us that, whatever the short term tactical advantage on the battlefield, the long term consequences will be severe. Even if the cluster ordnance failure rate has been reduced, we anticipate that more noncombatant death and damage will result from the use of cluster munitions, with Ukraine becoming yet another area where the world will have to spend millions to undo the damage. The United States will share moral responsibility for the unintended consequences that will certainly occur; the killing or maiming of innocent Ukrainian men, women and children and the contamination of Ukraine's rich farmland for decades to come.

We respectfully request that you reconsider this decision and seek to support Ukraine's legitimate efforts to defend itself through other means than using cluster munitions. We all recognize that the costs of this immoral war will be a terrible burden for the people of Ukraine for years to come. The United States should not contribute further to that burden with cluster munitions

Sincerely,

Charles A. Ray, (Ambassador 2002-2005)

Kent M. Wiedemann (Ambassador 1999-2002)

Joseph A. Mussomeli (Ambassador 2005-2008)