

**Syria: Mounting Casualties from Cluster Munitions** Human Rights Watch 16 March 2013 Syria

n forces' use of cluster munitions in residential areas is causing mounting civilian casualties, Human Rights Watch said today. An initial review of available information has identified at least 119 locations across Syria where at least 156 cluster bombs have been used in the past six months.

Human Rights Watch has investigated two cluster bomb attacks in the past two weeks – in Deir Jamal, near Aleppo and Talbiseh, near Homs – that have killed 11 civilians, including 2 women and 5 children, and wounded 27 others. (...)

On March 10, 2013, YouTube footage reportedly from Heish in Idlib showed a type of cluster munition remnant – the ShOAB-0.5 submunition – that is not known to have been used in the conflict before. The ShOAB-0.5 submunition is produced by the Soviet Union and is only known to be delivered by air-dropped RBK-500 cluster bombs.

Human Rights Watch has identified at least 119 locations in Syria where cluster munitions have been used in the period from August 2012 through mid-February. Several locations have been repeatedly attacked with cluster munitions, most notably al-Za`faraneh (near Rastan), as well as Abil (near Homs), Binnish (Idlib), Deir al`Assafeer (near Damascus), Douma (near Damascus), and Talbiseh (Homs).(...)

Human Rights Watch began to systematically collect and preserve the video evidence in October after initially identifying 35 strike sites attacked by at least 46 cluster munitions. In cooperation with the Brown Moses Blog, Human Rights Watch will make the entire collection of videos, supplemented by geographic coordinates and other analysis, available in a format compatible with the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) at a future date. This accounting will probably increase as more videos are collected and analyzed. The collection of data does not include recording casualties, but Human Rights Watch has documented numerous examples of civilian casualties from cluster munitions in Syria since mid-2012, including in October, November, and in January.

Forty percent of the 156 cluster bomb remnants have been identified as RBK-250 PTAB-2.5 cluster bombs, which are delivered by aircraft, including helicopters, and which break apart in mid-air to dispense 30 PTAB-2.5 high-explosive/anti-tank bomblets. Another type of cluster munition identified from the videos and research is the RBK-250 AO-1SCh cluster bomb, which disperses 150 AO-1SCh fragmentation bomblets. A total of 103 RBK-250 cluster bombs have been identified in the videos. In more than 50 other cases, remnants of a RBK cluster bomb were identified, such as its distinctive tail section, but there was not enough information to make an identification of the specific type.

submunition are not known to have been used previously in Syria. (...)

#### Recent Attacks on Deir Jamal and Talbiseh

In the past two weeks, Human Rights Watch has investigated civilian casualties from two cluster bomb attacks, at locations in Homs and Aleppo governorates. Based on interviews with witnesses, analysis of videos posted online by local activists, and photographs taken at the

scene, Human Rights Watch has concluded that a cluster bomb attack on Deir Jamal in Aleppo on February 28 killed 2 women and 5 children from the same family and injured a man, while another cluster bomb attack on Talbiseh in Homs on March 2 killed 4 and wounded 26 civilians, including 6 women and 7 children.

Human Rights Watch visited Deir Jamal on March 6 and 7 to investigate the air strikes, interviewing witnesses and photographing cluster bomb remnants.

A resident who lived next to a home destroyed in the attack told Human Rights Watch that he was 700 meters away from his house in the village at around 12:30 p.m. on February 28 when he saw a jet flying low that started dropping ordnance. He heard explosions and headed toward the site of the attack, the home of his neighbors, the Dabbas family. The witness said that he helped retrieve five bodies, while two more bodies were retrieved later. Another resident told Human Rights Watch that he was one kilometer away in the village at the time and saw a jet plane dropping ordnance. He went to the Dabbas family home, where he said he saw bodies and “pieces of bodies” of two women and five children.(...)

Human Rights Watch photographed remnants of the cluster bomb that hit the Dabbas home and another bomb that fell nearby. Witnesses said that three more cluster bombs fell in the northern and eastern parts of the village. From the photographs, Human Rights Watch has identified the remnants of a RBK-250/275 cluster bomb containing AO-1SCh fragmentation bomblets. There are 150 bomblets in each of this type of cluster bomb.

On March 2, a local activist in Talbiseh recorded [video](#) footage (subsequently uploaded online by the Committee to Protect Civilians-Talbiseh) of a cluster bomb attack on his neighborhood in the northern suburbs. Human Rights Watch interviewed the activist to corroborate the video evidence. The video captures the cluster bomb strike as it happens, showing the munition break apart and scatter submunitions, including some that fail to explode and bounce toward the camera. (...)

In total, the cluster bomb attack on March 2 killed at least four men, all civilians according to the activist, and wounded 26 people. The activist visited the local field hospital after the attack, where he said he counted the 26 wounded civilians, including 7 children and 6 women. He said that four men injured in the attack appeared to be in critical condition with internal bleeding caused by shrapnel. “The field hospital is not equipped so the medical team could not perform surgeries and at the same time we could not evacuate the wounded because of the siege imposed by the Syrian army,” the activist said.

The four men killed as a result of the cluster bomb attack were: Abdel Rahman al-Masri, Ahmad Swaiss, Selim Mohamad Miznazi, and Mohamed Abdel al-Kafi al-Mer`i.

From video footage uploaded online by the Network of Syrian Revolution News in Talbiseh, a group of Talbiseh activists, of remnants and description by the activist, Human Rights Watch has identified the remnants of a RBK cluster bomb canister.

Unexploded submunitions and other remnants left from the cluster bomb attack pose a deadly risk to those who handle them. The witness said: “An hour after the bomb canister hit the ground part of it exploded ... but didn’t cause any injuries.”(...)

**International Law** A majority of the world’s nations have comprehensively banned the use of cluster munitions through the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which came into force on August 1, 2010. Syria is not a party to the convention and did not participate in the 2007-2008 Oslo Process that led to the creation of the treaty, which bans cluster munitions and requires clearance of contaminated areas and assistance to victims. A total of 79 countries are party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, while another 32 have signed but not yet ratified. (...)

Human Rights Watch is a founding member of the international Cluster Munition Coalition, the civil society campaign behind the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

“All nations that have joined the treaty banning cluster bombs have a legal obligation to speak out and condemn Syria’s ever-expanding use of these indiscriminate weapons, yet too few are doing so,” Goose said. “If there was ever a time to speak out it is now. We urge all nations that care about the protection of civilians to condemn Syria’s cluster bomb assaults in the strongest possible terms.” **See full article [here](#)** .□