

Human Rights Watch documents Ukrainian military's use of cluster rockets

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Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report Monday documenting the widespread use of banned cluster munitions rockets by the Ukrainian military against heavily populated civilian centers in eastern Ukraine, including central Donetsk city.

The detailed account, based on an on-the-spot investigation by the New York-based organization, working with a *New York Times* reporter, is a damning exposure of the brutal and illegal methods being used by the US- and European Union-backed regime in Kiev against Ukrainians in the pro-Russian east of the country.

The report includes video interviews with victims of the cluster rocket attacks. It charges the Kiev regime with firing the weapons into Donetsk city, the center of the separatist rebellion against the fascist-backed, pro-Western government that was installed last February in a putsch orchestrated by the CIA and German intelligence.

HRW also released photos showing sections of the cluster munitions rockets in and around Donetsk, unexploded submunitions and remnants of exploded submunitions released by the rockets, and other physical proof of the regime's use of the weapons.

The report focuses on attacks launched October 2 and October 5 against Donetsk, a month after the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. HRW writes that these cluster munitions attacks, along with ten others it documented, were responsible for at least six deaths and dozens of injuries. The October 2 attack killed a 37-year-old International Committee of the Red Cross administrator stationed in Donetsk.

"It is shocking to see a weapon that most countries have banned used so extensively in eastern Ukraine," said Mark Hiznay, senior arms researcher at HRW. A

2008 international convention banning the use of cluster munitions has been signed by 114 countries. The US, Ukraine and Russia are among those that have not joined the convention.

"Ukrainian government forces used cluster munitions in populated areas in Donetsk city in early October 2014. The use of cluster munitions in populated areas violates the laws of war due to the indiscriminate nature of the weapon and may amount to war crimes," the report states.

Asked about the HRW report, Andriy Lysenko, the official spokesman for Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said Ukrainian troops had never used any prohibited munitions in the east. The government spokesman for the so-called "anti-terrorist operation" in eastern Ukraine, Vladyslav Seleznyov, described the accusations as "utter nonsense."

However, the HRW report outlines detailed physical evidence that cluster munitions were used for attacks on regions controlled by the pro-Russian rebels, and that they were fired by government forces. The report states:

"There is particularly strong evidence that Ukrainian government forces were responsible for several cluster munitions attacks on central Donetsk in early October. In addition to evidence at the impact site indicating that the cluster munitions came from the direction of government-controlled areas southwest of Donetsk, witnesses in that area said that they observed rockets being launched toward Donetsk on the times and days when cluster munitions struck the city. A *New York Times* journalist tracked down several rockets in that area, which appeared to have malfunctioned and fallen to the ground shortly after they were launched, clearly establishing the flight path of the rockets.

"Human Rights Watch found evidence of surface-

fired 220mm Uragan (Hurricane) and 300mm Smerch (Tornado) cluster munitions rockets. Human Rights Watch researchers observed and photographed the remnants of the cargo sections of 16 Uragan and 6 Smerch cluster munitions rockets. Altogether, these 22 rockets would have contained 912 individual fragmentation submunitions. The total number of cluster munitions rockets used so far in the conflict is unknown.”

In Donetsk, doctors at a city hospital and morgue said they had found cluster munitions fragments in several patients.

Cluster munitions are designed to indiscriminately kill or maim anyone within a wide radius. Those who fire them into heavily populated areas do so for the purpose of terrorizing and killing non-combatants.

As the HRW report explains: “Cluster munitions contain dozens or hundreds of smaller munitions, called submunitions, in a container such as a rocket or a bomb. After launch, the container opens up dispersing the submunitions which are designed to explode when they hit the ground. The submunitions are spread indiscriminately over a wide area, often the size of a football field, putting anyone in the area at the time of attack, whether combatants or civilians, at risk of death or injury. In addition, many of the submunitions do not explode on contact, but remain armed, become de facto landmines.”

The HRW report is not the first time charges have been made that the Kiev regime is using cluster munitions in its attempt to crush the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine. Last July, Sarah Blakemore, the director of the Cluster Munitions Coalition, which lobbies for a total ban on the weapons, wrote to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry after images were published indicating the use of cluster rockets against rebel positions in the cities of Slavyansk and Kramatorsk. Blakemore says she never received a reply.

The US and the European Union have continued to give unstinting support to the Kiev regime and its offensive in the east, despite repeated atrocities against civilians—air and tank assaults, massacres, abductions—carried out by the Ukrainian military as well as far-right militias and the National Guard, whose members are drawn largely from the neo-Nazi Right Sector and the far-right Svoboda party. These crimes

include the torching of the Trade Unions House in Odessa on May 2, which killed 38 pro-separatist protesters.

In fact, the bloody offensive in the east is largely directed by the CIA and US Special Forces operatives deployed to Ukraine. Last May, the German media published reports that 400 Academi (formerly known as Blackwater) mercenaries were directing the activities of the National Guard, the Right Sector and other government-backed neo-fascist militias such as the Azov Battalion.

These facts expose the lies promulgated by the US and Western governments and media presenting last February’s fascist-led coup and the US puppet government that replaced the deposed pro-Russian government as a “democratic revolution,” and blaming the ensuing crisis in Eastern Europe on Russian “aggression.”

The pro-Western protests in Kiev that led to the coup were orchestrated by the US and Germany for the purpose of weakening Russia and removing it as an impediment to their imperialist agendas in Europe and the Middle East.

That agenda remains unaltered by the cease-fire agreed to in early September. On Tuesday, one day after the release of the HRW report, Senators Carl Levin (Democrat of Michigan) and James Inhofe (Republican of Oklahoma) published a joint column in the *Washington Post* under the headline “Why Ukraine Should Have US Weapons.”

The chairman and ranking minority member, respectively, of the Senate Armed Services Committee called for Washington to increase its military assistance to Kiev by providing “defensive weapons” such as anti-tank weapons, ammunition and military vehicles. They backed their proposal with the claim that “[President] Poroshenko and the Ukrainian military has (sic) shown great restraint in resisting Russian provocations.”



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