

# Nato accused of violating international law in Kosovo

NATO BREACHED international law in its air attacks on Yugoslavia last year, a respected human rights body says in a report issued today.

The report, by Human Rights Watch, is particularly critical of the use of cluster-bombs. The United States stopped using the munitions halfway through the war, but Britain continued using them, raising serious issues about the Government's concern for civilian casualties.

Nato killed at least 500 civilians during the Kosovo conflict, the report concludes after visits to the sites of many of the attacks. "Human Rights Watch has found no evidence of war crimes," it says. But, it adds, "the investigation did conclude that Nato violated international humanitarian law".

The report says that Nato may have breached the Geneva Convention in five areas: it conducted air attacks using cluster-bombs near populated areas; attacked targets of questionable military legitimacy; did not take adequate measures to warn civilians of strikes; took insufficient precautions to identify the presence of civilians when attacking mobile targets; and caused excessive civilian casualties by not taking sufficient measures to verify that targets did not have concentrations of civilians.

Most of the attacks resulted from missing military targets. But "nine incidents were a result of strikes on non-military targets that Human Rights Watch believes were illegitimate", including Serb Radio and Television in Belgrade.

At least one-fifth of those who died were killed by cluster-bombs, which spray bomblets over a wide area. "Overall, cluster-bomb use by the United States and Britain can be confirmed in seven incidents throughout Yugoslavia (another five are possible but unconfirmed)," the report says.

BY ANDREW MARSHALL  
in Washington

"Some 90 to 150 civilians died from the use of these weapons."

It reveals the United States stopped using the weapons after a hitherto secret presidential order: "Widespread reports of civilian casualties from the use of cluster-bombs and international criticism of these weapons as potentially indiscriminate, in effect, led ... to an unprecedented US executive order in the middle of May to cease their further use in the conflict," the report says. "The White House issued the order

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only days after civilians were killed by Nato cluster-bombs in the city of Nis on May 7."

But Britain, according to the RAF's own reports, continued to use the weapons. "Cluster-bombs should not have been used in attacks in populated areas, let alone urban targets, given the risks," it says. "Nevertheless, the [RAF] continued to drop cluster-bombs, indicating the need for universal, not national, norms regarding cluster-bomb use." The report also says there is "some evidence" Yugoslav forces used civilians as human shields.

The body calls on Nato to "establish an independent and impartial commission ... that would ... consider the need to alter targeting and bombing doctrine to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law".