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Lebanon: Cluster-bombs threaten civilian lives - Update

The 34-day conflict between Israel and Hizbullah claimed the lives of some 1,000 civilians in Lebanon – about one third of them children. Now hundreds of thousands of unexploded cluster bombs fired by Israeli forces litter the villages of South Lebanon and are killing or injuring civilians every day. UN de-mining experts estimate that it will take years to clear the area.

"I [Marwa] picked up the bomb but I didn't know it was a bomb and Hassan said to throw it away and when I threw it, it exploded." Ten-year-old Hassan Tehini and 12-year-old girls Marwa and Sikne Me'ri, were injured when a cluster bomb exploded on 17 August 2006 near their home in the village of Ait al-Shaab. Hassan sustained very serious stomach injuries and Marwa and Sikne had shrapnel injuries all over their bodies. The doctor who saw Hassan said: "The boy's injuries were horrendous; his guts were hanging out and we were very worried that we may lose him."

Since the end of the war on 14 August, at least 15 people have been killed and more than 80 injured by unexploded cluster munitions, many while checking the damage to their homes or working on their land.

Cluster munitions spread small bombs over a wide area, many of which do not explode on impact but remain live and lethal. So far the UN Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) has identified more than 500 sites contaminated with as many as 350,000 unexploded Israeli cluster bombs in South Lebanon. More sites continue to be identified.

Almost all the cluster bombs launched by Israeli forces were launched in the last 72 hours of the conflict – after the ceasefire had been agreed on 11 August.

Israel has so far failed to respond to UN requests to hand over maps detailing the areas which its forces targeted with cluster bombs. These are vital to assist bomb clearance and reduce the potential for further civilian casualties.

Call to action

Write to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Force calling for the immediate hand-over of Israeli maps to the UN to reduce the risk of unexploded cluster-bombs to Lebanese civilians.

Sample letter

Dear Mr Peretz and Lieutenant-General Halutz,

I am writing to express concern that civilians in Lebanon, particularly children, are at risk of death or injury from cluster bombs fired by Israeli forces during the recent conflict.

I call on the Israeli authorities to take immediate action to hand over maps and other information to the UN detailing comprehensively and specifically the locations in Lebanon of cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance were dropped, to enable the UN to coordinate the clearance of these devices.

Yours sincerely,

Marwa (left) and Sikne (right) Me'ri. The two girls were injured when a cluster bomb exploded in the village of Ait al-Shaab on 17 August 2006a

