

PUBLIC

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20 December 2006

Further Information on 237/06 (MDE 15/080/2006, 1 September 2006) Fear for safety

ISRAEL/LEBANON

Civilians in Lebanon, particularly children

The number of civilians killed and injured as a result of unexploded cluster bombs in south Lebanon, which were dropped by Israeli forces during the recent conflict between Israel and Hizbullah, is increasing steadily. Some 26 people have reportedly lost their lives, and some 186 have been injured.

Cluster munitions spread small bomblets over a wide area, many of which do not explode on impact but remain live and lethal. Children are particularly vulnerable and some have been killed while playing in their towns and villages. Other people have been killed while investigating their homes for damage following the war and others while working on their land.

Amnesty International delegates in Lebanon during August and September 2006 met two 12-year old girls, Marwa and Sikne Me'ri, and a 10-year-old boy, Hassan Tehini, who were injured when a cluster bomb exploded on 17 August near their home in the village of Ait al-Shaab, south Lebanon. Hassan had serious stomach injuries and doctors feared for his life, while the two girls suffered shrapnel wounds all over their bodies.

The UN Mine Action Coordination Center (UN MACC), which is responsible for organising clearance of unexploded ordnance in Lebanon, has identified hundreds more bomb strike areas that are contaminated with unexploded bombs. On 14 December 2006, UN MACC reported that it had identified 832 sites contaminated with Israeli cluster bombs in south Lebanon. Ninety per cent of the cluster bomb strikes, according to a senior UN official, occurred in the last 72 hours of the conflict, when a ceasefire was in sight. It is estimated that clearance work will have to continue for at least one year.

In addition, UN MACC said that on 24 November 2006 it found evidence that Israeli forces had also laid land mines during the recent conflict. Explosive ordnance was detonated by four goats in the area of Deir Mimas, south Lebanon. A de-miner who tried to help the goat herder leave the area where the explosion occurred stepped on a land mine, which exploded causing him to lose a leg from the knee down. Another de-miner, trying to assist the first, detonated another mine resulting in the amputation of one of his legs below the knee. A doctor who was with them also sustained minor injuries.

Following this incident, a team from BACTEC, an explosive ordnance disposal and landmine clearance company, apparently discovered a newly laid Israeli No4 Anti Personnel mine in the area, after a third de-miner lost a foot stepping on a land mine. According to UN MACC, the landmines were laid by Israeli forces in order to prevent access to the area. Following these incidents, the UN made an urgent request to the Israeli authorities via the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to provide information detailing the locations where Israeli forces laid landmines during the conflict.

Israel has yet to respond adequately to UN requests to hand over maps detailing the areas it targeted with cluster bombs. The maps are needed to assist bomb clearance and so reduce the potential for further civilian casualties. According to the UN MACC, Israel had provided only some maps which are inadequate, as they refer only to areas "likely to contain unexploded ordnance," and do not indicate whether they are cluster bombs or other unexploded ordnance. Although the Israeli army reportedly provided UNIFIL with maps on 9 October 2006, these covered only minefields it laid during its occupation of south Lebanon from 1978 until 2000. According to UNIFIL, the Israeli army gave them "maps of minefields in south Lebanon as of June 2000 after their withdrawal." The maps, in turn, were given to UN MACC.

In a meeting with Amnesty International's Secretary General on 7 December, Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh told Amnesty International that, as far as he was aware, the Israeli army did not possess maps showing in detail the locations in Lebanon in which Israeli forces used cluster munitions. If this is correct, and Israel does not possess maps of the areas into which its forces fired cluster bombs, this would be a further indication that Israeli forces used these weapons indiscriminately and without taking due precautions to protect civilians who could be placed at risk by their use.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Hebrew or your own language:

- expressing concern that civilians in Lebanon, particularly children, are at risk of death or injury from cluster bombs and other unexploded munitions fired or left by Israeli forces during the recent conflict;
- calling on the Israeli authorities to take immediate action to hand over to the UN maps and other information detailing comprehensively and specifically the locations in Lebanon where cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance were dropped, to enable the UN to coordinate the clearance of these devices;
- calling on the Israeli government to announce an immediate moratorium on the use of cluster munitions by its forces in view of the danger they pose to civilians in the areas in which they are used.

APPEALS TO:

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence
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Email: sar@mod.gov.il OR pniot@mod.gov.il OR aperetz@knesset.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Minister

Lieutenant-General Dan Halutz
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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel/Lebanon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 January 2007.