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Lebanon/Israel: Israel must disclose details of cluster bomb attacks and accept a full investigation

Amnesty International today called on Israel to immediately provide maps of the areas of Lebanon into which it fired cluster bombs during the recent conflict to enable their clearance and prevent further civilian casualties.

Publishing new accounts from the victims of unexploded cluster bombs, the organization also called on Israel to cooperate in a full and impartial investigation into their use of such munitions during the recent conflict.

The calls followed a report from the United Nations that 90 percent of Israeli cluster bomb strikes occurred in the last 72 hours of the conflict when a ceasefire was in sight. The U.N. Mine Action Coordination Center has so far identified more than 400 bomb strike areas that are contaminated with as many as 100,000 unexploded bomblets.

Amnesty International delegates in Lebanon have found numerous unexploded cluster bombs in villages and even, in some cases, inside homes.

"The use of cluster bombs in the heart of where people live clearly violates the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks and is therefore a grave violation of international humanitarian law," said Kate Gilmore, Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International. "It is outrageous that, despite official requests from the United Nations, Israel has still not provided maps for the areas it targeted with cluster bombs. This failure is further endangering the lives of Lebanese civilians, particularly children."

Cluster munitions spread bomblets over a wide area and many of them do not explode on impact, remaining lethal to the civilian population.

"Cluster bombs are effectively antipersonnel mines. Their widespread use in Lebanon by the Israeli military is already taking a heavy toll on the hundreds of thousands of ordinary men, women and children returning to their homes. The US, which is the main supplier of arms to Israel, and other countries, should not provide such weapons and commit to a worldwide moratorium on their use," said Kate Gilmore.

A current Amnesty International mission to Lebanon has spoken to some of the victims of unexploded cluster bombs among the hundreds of thousands of civilians returning to their homes in Southern Lebanon.

Six-year-old 'Abbas Yusef Shibli described to Amnesty International delegates how a cluster bomb exploded as he tried to pick it up in the village of Blida on 26 August. Speaking from a hospital bed, Abbas said he was playing with three friends when he tried to pick up what looked like a "perfume bottle". Abbas suffered a ruptured colon, ruptured gall bladder, perforated lung and torn medial nerve and has so far undergone two blood transfusions. His three playmates were also injured, but discharged after two days.

In the next room, Mahmud Yaqub, a 38-year-old shepherd, lay with his leg in plaster having had it shattered when he stepped on a cluster bomb. Mahmud said he'd lost four of his 21 goats during the Israeli attacks as they were unable to get to water. He was rarely able to take them outside during the fighting and now, since the ceasefire, cluster bombs litter the hillsides which are their normal pasture.

At another hospital, Amnesty International visited 13-year-old Hassan Hussein Hamadi who remains in a coma after surgery. His family said that, on 27 August, he and his five brothers and sisters had been playing in the front yard of their home in the village of Deir al-Qanun south of Tyre when he picked up a canister type cluster bomb that then exploded. The explosion blew off four fingers of his right hand, leaving only his little finger and he sustained major injuries to his shoulder and abdomen.

19-year-old Hussein Qaduh, a student in accounting at the Beirut Islamic Technical Institute, was severely injured by a cluster bomb on 28 August in the southern Lebanese village of Soutaniye as he walked along a path in the village next to a football field. When Amnesty International delegates visited the area the next day, they found it was littered with unexploded cluster munitions, some of them a few inches from the path, where the blood was still visible on the ground. Hussein underwent extensive surgery for haemorrhaging in the intestines and liver. This was stopped but bleeding continued in the brain. His prognosis was described as extremely critical.

Amnesty International reiterated that Israel's use of cluster bombs underlined the need for an immediate and comprehensive UN investigation into this and other violations of international humanitarian law committed by both Israel and Hizbullah during this conflict.

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