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Op-Ed on the Occasion of Mine Action Day  
Lebanon  
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### **Countering the Sleeping Enemy**

Three weeks ago, Fouad Moussa Ghinweh, a young shepherd from south Lebanon, left his home and headed out into the fields of Houla with his sheep, thinking it was just another normal working day. It was not. Fouad stepped on an unexploded cluster munition and shortly afterwards succumbed to his injuries. He became one of over 280 civilians to have been killed or maimed in the past three years by cluster bombs, landmines or other remnants of war sprawled across southern Lebanon.

Every MP, local official and resident I spoke to in south Lebanon last week when I was touring the area said cluster bombs and landmines were among their top concerns. Farmers cannot always cultivate their land, residents cannot enjoy the beautiful green expanse, and children are easy prey for those deadly devices.

During the 2006 conflict between Hizbullah and Israel, some 48 million square meters of Lebanese land were contaminated by unexploded cluster munitions. Around 80 percent of the contaminated areas have been cleared since then through the joint work of the Lebanese authorities and the United Nations. The remaining cluster bombs continue to affect people's daily lives, restrict their freedom of movement, and impede the critically important process of reconstruction.

Dubbed the "sleeping enemy", cluster munitions have been utilised in conflicts in at least 32 countries or territories worldwide, and landmines in even more. These deadly munitions lie in wait long after the fighting ends. Their primary victims are civilians, often innocent children.

This reality has prompted the United Nations to mark on 4 April of every year the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, a reminder to the world that cluster munitions and landmines are lethal, vicious and must be banned.

In Lebanon, the United Nations has long been aware of the dangers posed by these devices. Shortly after Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000, the United

Nations, in coordination with the Lebanese Army and the international community, led a widespread campaign to clear villages and towns of an estimated 500,000 landmines. While much was done, some 375,000 mines remain along the Blue Line and the area adjacent to it.

More recently, the focus has been on clearing the area of cluster munitions. The United Nations has and continues to call on Israel to urgently hand over the strike data of cluster bombs it dropped in south Lebanon. Achieving this is an important task for me as United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

Clearing large swathes of land from landmines and cluster munitions is essential but it is not enough. More must be done to ensure that these lethal weapons are not used again to harm people, not only in Lebanon but also in other countries around the world.

Lebanon did the right thing last December when it signed, along with 95 other States, the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Oslo that prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of these weapons. Israel must do the same.

All countries are encouraged to sign another important and more longstanding convention, the 1997 Ottawa Treaty that bans the use and stockpiling of landmines, which has already been ratified by 156 countries. I urge Lebanon to join this Treaty and take the necessary measures to clear remaining minefields.

South Lebanon is a living example of why doing so would be of critical importance. The tragic humanitarian effects of cluster bombs, landmines and other general remnants of war must be addressed immediately. Countering the “sleeping enemy” in Lebanon will save numerous lives, and help achieve stability and prosperity for many of its citizens.

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