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News Brief

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1. U.N. Mine Action Programme Receives the Nansen Refugee Award

Christopher Clark, head of the United Nations Mine Action Programme in southern Lebanon, and his team of 990 deminers received the Nansen Refugee Award of 2008 for their work in removing landmines and unexploded ordnance, including cluster submunitions, from southern Lebanon. Following the war in Lebanon in 2006, Clark and his team immediately began working in villages and on land used for agricultural purposes, clearing approximately 149,000 cluster bombs and allowing nearly one million displaced persons to return. The Nansen Refugee Award gives the recipient US\$100,000 to donate to a charity of their choosing.

2. California Woman Pays for Zimbabwean's Surgery

Recently, Operation Hope Executive Director Jennifer Trubenbach came to the rescue of a Zimbabwean boy, Beloved, by agreeing to personally pay for facial-reconstructive surgery. Beloved was injured in a landmine blast

that occurred when he reached for what he thought was a transistor radio. He lived with a disfigured face for six years before Trubenbach helped him pay for his surgery. Trubenbach's commitment to Beloved meant that she had to take out a second mortgage on her home; she also offered him a place to stay while recovering from the surgery.

Beloved's surgery was performed in the United States by Operation Hope with the assistance of Drs. Keith Blackwell and Babak Azizzadeh. After a recovery period of six months, which Beloved spent in California with Trubenbach and her family, he returned to Zimbabwe, where he was welcomed home by friends and family.

3. Injury, Fire, Lack of Funding Complicate Demining in Lebanon

While most of the immediate landmine danger has been removed from southern Lebanon along its border with Israel, multiple factors have complicated the demining process throughout the country. In southern Lebanon, 43 percent of the contaminated land has been fully cleared, while another 49 percent was surface-cleared, according to the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre. UNMACC-SL has been a leading force in clearing mines in this area; however, because of a lack of funding, many of its clearance teams stopped work at the end of August 2008. As a result, the injury rate is expected to escalate because, as in the past, locals will likely attempt to remove contaminants themselves when they face a lack of assistance.

In late July 2008, a Lebanese citizen, Abbas Akout, working with the Mines Advisory Group, was injured by a cluster bomb that detonated near him while he was attempting to disarm landmines in Zwatar, a village in southern Lebanon. The cluster bomb was identified as one of the bombs dropped by Israel in southern Lebanon during 2006. Akout sustained moderate damage to his hands and feet. More than 50 Lebanese and international workers, as well as over 250 civilians, have already been injured by these cluster bombs.

Also in July, emergency crews fighting a forest fire in the Bmikin region of Lebanon faced a unique challenge: extinguishing a fire in an area where cluster munitions from the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict of 2006, as well as landmines from the Lebanese civil war, were still polluting the land. The resulting explosions and decreased safety of the area caused several hectares of forest (one hectare equals approximately 2.5 acres) to be destroyed before the fire was eventually extinguished.

4. Angolan Demining Allows for Building of Infrastructure

The Angolan Armed Forces, the National Reconstruction Office and the National Institute for Demining deactivated and destroyed at least 120,308 anti-personnel landmines between 1996 and July 2008. The National Demining Commission also announced that two million explosive devices, more than two tons (over 1,800 kilograms) of lethal material, and 13,983 anti-tank landmines were also cleared. In the same period, more than 81,000 kilometers (50,330 miles) of roads have been repaired after being declared free from landmine danger, and more than 2,200 kilometers (1,360 miles) of railway have been similarly declared safe. Further demining will allow Angola to provide greater improvements to its infrastructure, which has deteriorated because of limited access for repairs.

5. HDI Partnership with Business School to Help UXO Survivors in Vietnam

The Humpty Dumpty Institute announced a partnership with Columbia University Business School's executive education division, which will assist HDI with a development project for unexploded-ordnance survivors in Vietnam. This partnership is part of the business school's new "Positive Impact Project," in which students of the

Columbia Senior Executive Program generate meaningful international projects for the nonprofit sector. This year, the CSEP class will concentrate its energies on revamping HDI's business/marketing plan for its "Mushrooms with a Mission" program, which aims to assist UXO survivors in Vietnam's most contaminated region, the Quảng Trị province.

Mushrooms with a Mission trains survivors in growing mushrooms and helps survivors collectively sell their products to a processing facility. The mushrooms are then promoted, packaged and sold to local and regional markets in Asia. A portion of the proceeds is donated to UXO-removal projects, and the project doubles the annual income of participating farmers in the Quang Tri province.

6. Relief for Amputees with "Phantom Limbs"

Dr. Atul Gawande recently published an article in *The New Yorker* titled, "The Itch," in which Gawande offered some inexpensive and rapid methods to minimize or eliminate pain that comes from a sensation known to many as a "phantom limb." For an amputee, a phantom limb is a sensation that makes one's amputated appendage feel as if it is still attached and moving. This sensation can be very painful for amputees.

Gawande cited a phantom limb case study by Dr. V.S. Ramachandran from the University of California, San Diego. In his experiments Ramachandran used a mirror-in-a-box contraption that helped give his patients immediate relief by "tricking" the patient's brain into believing the limb was still attached and could be moved to relieve the discomfort. The patient spent a few minutes a day lying with the mirror reflecting the remaining limb as if it was the missing limb; movement of the remaining limb was found to relieve the stress and pain caused by the phantom limb sensations. The rest of Atul Gawande's article on these experiments/techniques can be found online at <http://snipurl.com/41uj9>.

7. Coroner criticizes British MoD for soldier's death in minefield rescue

On 6 September 2006, Cpl. Wright, of Edinburgh, Scotland, was killed by a landmine blast while trapped in an unmarked Afghan minefield. Six of his Paratrooper comrades were also injured. During a hearing regarding Wright's death, coroner Andrew Walker openly criticized the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence, remarking that the troops in Afghanistan during the incident did not have access to the proper equipment and resources required for a safe, minefield-rescue operation.

Wright and his platoon of paratroopers became stranded inside the minefield after a sniper in their platoon strayed into the unmarked area and was injured by an explosion. According to the coroner, the blast that killed Wright was set off by the downdraft from a RAF Chinook helicopter that was being used for the rescue. The Chinook was not equipped with a winch that the trapped soldiers had requested, and after realizing that the Chinook could set off another landmine explosion, the soldiers waved away the helicopter. As it departed, a landmine was set off and exploded, striking Cpl. Wright. Two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters equipped with winches came afterwards and rescued the soldiers. Wright died while on board one of the helicopters. A head official from the military's Joint Helicopter Command denied that the helicopter had set off the blast.

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