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Lebanon

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The Notorious Blue Line

Lebanon's mine-affected areas stretch from the densely contaminated southern borders to the relatively less mine-contaminated areas of former civil war confrontation lines in the central and northern regions of the country. Though areas throughout the southern and central provinces have several successful demining projects underway, implications for civilians still remain bleak. The "blue line"—the land around Lebanon and Israel's common border—is the most deadly area in the entire nation, affected by an estimated 1,869 minefields.¹ Brig. Gen. Salim Raad, director of the National Demining Office, comments that the south has the highest concentration of landmines due to the former Israeli occupation. Though demining has begun in the last several years and the Israelis no longer occupy the area, the history of conflict still affects the population; Lebanese nationals hesitate to begin demining this area due to continuing discord with Israel.²

Demining has been inhibited because funding is low; the current goal of completing demining by 2014 is contingent upon the availability of funds and resources.² Despite the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, Lebanon has not signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention,³ though the nation stated at the 2004 Nairobi summit that it adheres to the spirit of the Convention.

Demining

Regardless of the Lebanese government's reluctance to join the Convention, the National Demining Office, created in 1998, is effectively working to reduce landmine casualties. Though resources and funding are limited, the NDO has produced monumental results by working in conjunction with the United Arab Emirates, the government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations.⁴ Due to well-organized demining and mine risk education projects and training, landmine-related casualties are down significantly, from 119 in 2000 to 14 in 2004.⁴

Implications for Civilians

The effects of landmine contamination still dramatically affect over 4,000 Lebanese families, according to Habbouba Aoun, coordinator of the Landmines Resource Center in Lebanon. Surveyors from the LMRC accompanied members of local non-governmental organizations to every village in Lebanon, knocking on doors to collect data. Each of these 4,000 households, according to the LMRC survey completed in 1998, has at least one member who has been injured or killed by a landmine. The 1998 survey was supported by the World Rehabilitation Fund and the United States Agency for International Development. Since then, data has been updated on a bi-annual basis; follow-up visits to landmine survivors take place every year. Norwegian People's Aid facilitated the re-visiting process by contributing some funds in 2002 and 2004.

Stories like the one in the box at the right are not uncommon. With the wide and dense spread of landmines in Lebanon, the surveyors



(click on thumbnail to see larger image in new window)

Forbidden by her family to speak to anyone until the 1998 door-to-door survey was conducted, one young woman, now in her mid-

in 1998 sought to identify and help silently suffering landmine victims like the woman profiled here. Seeking to rebuild the lives of survivors, the LMRC works with the members of the local non-governmental organizations because the most effective way to make improvements is to elicit community participation and ownership. As an aid to developing self-sufficiency in the communities, the LMRC serves as an advisory resource and partners with NGOs to assist and train citizens on issues within the individual villages.

Mine Risk Education

The NDO intends to improve the future of the mine-affected population in Lebanon by instilling knowledge and values to bring about behavioral change. NDO programs target children in schools, especially for MRE, as a way of promoting awareness in the population. Other successful activities and awareness sessions have reached universities, academies and military service barracks. Generating awareness of the implications for Lebanon's people is key in the efforts to support the NDO and create "a unified vision on possible intervention strategies."⁴

30s, revealed her story for the first time to the surveyors. She was playing in the yard with her sister when her father called for her to come inside. Hearing a loud explosion, she returned to the yard to see her sister's lifeless body in the air. A second explosion followed, leaving the girl with permanent injuries. She now lives without one eye, her left hand and a lower limb. Multiple injuries cover her entire body, and there are still pieces of metal embedded in her flesh.

Her family has since sequestered her from society; she was only 13 years old when the accident happened. They faced the difficult reality of the tragedy, and the girl survived after 13 months of treatment. The ending, however, is far from happy. The family sees her as bad luck, requiring that she stay inside the home indefinitely to fulfill the household duties. Because of cultural conventions in Lebanon, this woman's family prevents her from speaking to anyone, and they display deep resentment for the burden that her needs have placed on the family's resources during wartime. They see her as a curse; they treat her as inhuman.⁵

Endnotes

1. "Lebanon." *Landmine Monitor Report*. 2004. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/lebanon>. Accessed Aug. 25, 2005.
2. Brigadier General Salim Raad. Personal interview by Kelly Peterson, July 18, 2005.
3. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed Oct. 10, 2005.
4. Lebanon National Demining Office Web site. 2005. <http://www.ndo-lb.org>. Accessed Sept. 15, 2005.
5. Telephone interview with Ms. Habbouba Aoun. Sept. 2, 2005.

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