

## **“Together for a safer life”, together for a mine-free land**



Monday 12 September 2011 marked the opening of the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lebanon.

Representatives from around 90 governments , 38 observer states and entities, 60 national and international organizations, and survivors from affected countries are attending the conference, which will last till Friday 16 September, with one aim in mind: to discuss the progress made to implement the treaty obligations. International and national civil society organizations are highlighting their work in mine action and mine risk reduction by organizing side activities in the Monroe Hotel in Beirut.

During this week, participants are exchanging their views on cluster munitions clearance and risk reduction methods, highlighting the means of cooperation and assistance and showcasing national implementation measures.

In his intervention Brigadier General Mohamed Fehmi, Director of the Lebanon Mine Action Center talked about Lebanon’s effort to meet its obligations under Article 4. He also explained that The Lebanese Mine Action Center and the Lebanese Armed Forces have elaborated a strategy plan that guides the implementation of the Convention and the rights of people with disabilities. “We will do our best to fully implement the Convention” he said.

From the Middle East region, only Lebanon and Syria are States Parties and have ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In November 2010, Lebanon ratified the Convention and has been actively engaged from the very beginning of the diplomatic Oslo Process to negotiate the Convention, which began in February 2007.



“Holding the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on cluster bombs is an expression of our political uniting will to confront the tragic effects of this weapon, which neither discriminates between civilians from military targets nor spare men, women, youngsters, seniors or children” said H.E President of Lebanese Republic, General Michel Sleiman during the opening ceremony of the Meeting at the UNESCO Palace.



General Sleiman also expressed the full commitment of the Lebanese government to the Convention’s provisions, particularly when it comes to assisting victims of cluster munitions and clearing its territory of their waste.

Mr. Robert Watkins, UNDP Resident Representative in Lebanon explained that for UNDP, the Convention on Cluster Munitions is a prime example of what states, international organizations and civil society can accomplish together to

save lives and limbs, protect personal security and integrity and preserve livelihoods, three elements that are universally important and underpin the prospects for sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.”

During the conflict of 2006, Lebanon suffered severe cluster munitions contamination. It is estimated that 4.2 millions of cluster munitions were used, contaminating large inhabited areas, houses, school yards, hospitals, and farmland. Confirmed CBU strike locations totaled 1,277 contaminating approximately 54.9 square kilometers of land.



After the July 2006 war, and due to the established coordination capacities, existing clearance capacities, the presence of UN and Lebanese forces and the timely disbursement of funding by the international donor community, there was a rapid and structured response to cluster munitions

contamination. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams and Battle area clearance (BAC) teams were mobilized and commenced clearance operations. Approximately 33% of the contaminated land remains to be cleared.

In order to observe clearance and risk education, victim assistance and rehabilitation activities in South Lebanon, hundreds of participants in the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, headed to Nabatiyeh and Sarafand.

At the Regional Mine Action Center in Nabatiyeh, they were introduced to procedures and equipments used during the complex mine clearance process and they witnessed a live battle area clearance site. In addition, the Nabatieh field visit was also an



opportunity to meet mine survivors who are active in their society.

Atef Hamza, the Director of Beit Al Jarih, was showcasing in the exhibition the handmade work of his colleagues who just like him were injured by cluster munitions. "But these incidents didn't stop us from being productive. We overcome it each day we feel that we are effective members of this society", he said.

At the Welfare Association for the Handicapped, Nabih Berry Center in Sarafand, participants took part in the preparation of souvenirs and gadgets produced by mine action survivors, just like Hussein Ghandour, a member of the Landmine Survivors football team who produces artificial limbs.

Hussein really hopes that the world stands united against cluster bombs, whoever is producing, using and dealing with them.

Holding this meeting in Lebanon will provide a unique opportunity to highlight the challenges facing countries that have suffered from cluster munitions' contamination and to demonstrate that the problem can be solved through a collaborative effort.

At the end of the Meeting, a press conference will be held on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 at Monroe Hotel in Beirut.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and the President of the Second Meeting Dr. Adnan Mansour will hold the press conference along the United Nations Resident Coordinator Mr. Robert Watkins, the Head of delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mr. Jurg Montani and the Chairman of the Cluster Munitions Coalition (CMC) Mr. Steve Goose.

The speakers will discuss the progress made since last year's conference in Vientiane, Beirut Progress Report, the outcome of this year's Conference and the way to go forward.