

Young women in Lebanon take up demining jobs

Demining is being taken up in Lebanon by women, seven of whom are clearing some of the estimated one million cluster bombs scattered across the south as a result of the 2006 Israeli offensive.

Chosen from among 30 applicants, the seven women were selected by a Swedish demining team working on cluster bombs in southern Lebanon. Some of the women left their previous jobs to join the foreign teams helping in demining areas across southern Lebanon.

'I left my job as a nurse in one of Tyre's hospitals and decided to start helping in clearing my land of cluster bombs,' 37-year-old Raheel Korani told DPA. 'I decided to carry out this new job after I saw the ordeal of the victims of such bombs in the hospital.'

De-miners from the UN and affiliated agencies have already found nearly 100,000 bomblets since August. Reports have indicated that there are about 1.2 million cluster bomblets scattered across southern Lebanon as a result of the widespread Israeli offensive on Lebanon that started July 12.

Israel launched a land, sea and air offensive into Lebanon after the Lebanese Shia militant movement Hezbollah snatched two Israeli soldiers during a cross-border attack. The war ended in mid-August with an UN-sponsored ceasefire.

A cluster bomb consists of a container holding hundreds of smaller bomblets. It opens in mid-air and disperses the bomblets over a large area.

Cluster bombs are intended for use against troop formations and can quickly clear a battlefield of combatants. But the bomblets do not always explode on impact and can continue to kill innocent civilians years later.

So far, since the war ended in Lebanon, 30 people have been killed and 186 wounded as a result of cluster bomb blasts in various areas in southern Lebanon.

'Seeing people dying every day or suffering from injuries made me decide to join the team of de-miners,' said 24-year-old Hanaa Kirani. 'It is a dangerous task, but we should clear our fields and land from such ordnance. God will protect us.'

The newly hired women de-miners are mainly Shia Muslims from southern Lebanon.

'This is a great job,' said 20-year-old Zeinab Mahnaa, youngest of the seven women. 'It is a job where you save people and especially children from dying or losing their limbs.'

The seven Lebanese women received training from a Swedish team, who are currently working on demining fields in southern Lebanon.

'The girls have surveyed three fields with mines and cluster bombs, and there are now 14 people, among them the seven girls, working on such a mission,' Swedish explosives expert Robert Ericsson, who was overseeing the women, told DPA.

Dayla Farran, a UN spokeswoman in southern Lebanon, said that so far 841 spots had been located with mines or cluster bombs.

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