

Opening Speech

Head of Delegation European Union to Lebanon

Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst

De-mining International Support Group meeting

15 December 2011

Le Bristol Hotel, Beirut

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to thank UNDP and the Lebanese Mine Action Centre for inviting us to this De-mining International Support Group.

The last time we met was in 2009. Since then, a lot of progress has been made. The number of accidents or casualties in Lebanon was dramatically reduced thanks to the efforts of our partners in-country and the international community as a whole.

The Lebanese Mine Action Centre successfully took over from the UN Mine Action Centre at the end of 2009, thanks to the commitment of its staff and support from the Lebanese Government and members of this Support Group.

The Lebanese Mine Action Centre, with UNDP support, also finalised the National Mine Action Strategy for 2011-2020 which is the main guidance tool for all stakeholders and donors involved in demining.

The European Union welcomes the fact that Lebanon has signed and ratified the Oslo Convention on banning cluster munitions and very successfully hosted the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions last September. The role of UNDP in the meeting's preparation and proceedings is also important to mention.

We now all strongly encourage the Government of Lebanon to sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention on the Use, Stockpiling, Production of Anti-Personnel Landmines. During our recent discussions with the Lebanese government in the EU-Lebanon Association Committee, the Ottawa Convention was mentioned as one of this government's priorities.

And we also of course welcome the fact that Lebanon was present as observer – in the person of General Mohammad Fehmi – at the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention which was recently held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Dear friends, as you know the European Union is the main donor in the field of humanitarian demining in Lebanon, with €18 million mobilised since 2006. We have a twofold approach implemented through complementary interventions. On the one hand, we finance mine clearance activities - currently over €6 million through

five non governmental organisations operating in South Lebanon on cluster bombs clearance, as well as in North and Central Lebanon in landmine clearance. On the other hand, we provide capacity building for the Lebanese Mine Action Centre through a contribution agreement with UNDP. The results of a recent mid-term evaluation, confirmed the high relevance and real impact of our support on the concerned communities in Lebanon. This is only possible as we have quality partners, both the Lebanese Mine Action Centre and UNDP.

I would also like to stress that our support for demining activities is implemented in close coordination with two EU Member States, Italy and Belgium who contribute financially to demining and capacity building.

But, today, still 133 million square meters remain to be cleared all around Lebanon. The European Union is ready to provide further support in 2012 to this effect. We will continue to give grants to NGOs operating in the field, as well as capacity building for the Lebanese Mine Action Centre and activities related to mine victim assistance and education.

Let us work today towards an even closer cooperation amongst ourselves and with all our partners not present here today, to reach our common goal: a Lebanon free from landmines and cluster munitions.

Thank you