

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina EICHHORST  
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**Visit to the Regional Mine Action Centre in Nabatieh**

**Friday, 27 July 2012**

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*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

General Odeimi

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for having me with you today. It is a great opportunity to see the essential work of battle field area clearance on the ground.

The European Union is actively involved on all continents in supporting demining programmes, research and development of technology, and assistance to mine victims. These weapons must not be used anymore: they have obvious humanitarian consequences, and they also pose tremendous socio-economic challenges to development.

When a country is hit by a conflict and faces the risk of mines, cluster bombs and unexploded ordnance, it is of utmost importance to act without delay. The European Union is determined to help and has the tools to intervene, firstly through immediate humanitarian assistance in order to save lives and restore decent living conditions, and subsequently by accompanying the affected populations in order to help them restart their economic, social and cultural activities.

In Lebanon, the European Union has been active in the demining efforts since 2000, but we have increased our support after the conflict of July 2006. Since 2006, we have donated 18 million Euros to demining operations. Our current demining programme of 7 million Euros, which was launched mid-2010, aims at reducing the risk represented by the cluster munitions in Southern Lebanon and the mines in the Central and Northern areas of the country. In this context, several NGOs are currently conducting clearance activities in South Lebanon under the responsibility and coordination of the Lebanese Mine Action Centre. Our current programme also aims at increasing the capacity of the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, and its regional centre in the South, the Regional Mine Action Centre, to manage this level of clearance activity.

Lives have been saved and the number of injured people has decreased. Many people have also been able to return to their homes or their land, which is fundamental for local life and the economy to return to normal.

Despite of these positive results, there is still a considerable number of unexploded ordnance. Too many children are still prevented from playing in the field, too many men and women are still risking to be injured for life.

But action on mines and unexploded ordnance does not only consist of clearing mined areas. I want to praise Lebanon's commitments towards international treaties, as illustrated by the ratification in 2010 of the Oslo Convention which bans cluster munitions. The European Union also supports the universal signature and ratification of the Ottawa

Convention on anti-personnel mines, which Lebanon has not yet ratified. We encourage the Lebanese government to do so.

I would like to highlight the meticulous and patient work of the demining teams, who work very closely with the local communities. I also want to underline the crucial coordination role of the Lebanese Mine Action Centre. I thank the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, specifically General Odeimi, the Lebanese Army and the various NGOs for organising this visit, and I express my gratitude to the people who are risking their lives every day to protect their community.

I hope that, thanks to the efforts of these stakeholders, Lebanon will achieve its goal to be mine free in the near future.

Thank you.