

**Address of Elsa Fenet, Chargée d'Affaires a.i.
Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

Lebanese Parliament
Thursday 4 April 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

H.E. Mr. Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament

H.E. Mr. Fayeze Ghosn, Minister of National Defence

Brigadier General Imad Odeimi, Director of the Lebanese Mine Action Centre

Mr. Robert Watkins, UNDP Resident Representative

Distinguished participants,

Thank you for having brought us together to celebrate this important day in a country which is still suffering from the risk represented by mines, cluster bombs and unexploded ordnance.

Mines, cluster bombs and unexploded ordnance constitute not only serious threats to the safety of the population, but also an impediment to social and economic development.

The efforts of public institutions, donors and civil society organisations active in the field of demining cannot be underestimated. All their activities are being coordinated in a dedicated and effective manner by the Lebanese Mine Action Centre (LMAC). I would like to congratulate General Imad Odeimi for his active role as Director of the LMAC, in continuously fighting mine contamination in Lebanon. I reiterate our support for the Lebanese Mine Action Centre's "2011-2020 National Mine Action Strategy". The European Union

encourages the national authorities to fully implement it to eradicate the still severe levels of mine contamination in the country.

Allow me also to pay tribute to the dedication and courage of local inhabitants, especially young women, who have enrolled to carry out the delicate and dangerous mine-clearing activities – working for the sake of their families, for their communities and for Lebanon, for us.

The European Union is a major donor in mine-clearance in Lebanon, with a contribution of 28 million Euros for the period 2006-2015. We support a comprehensive approach which includes: mine clearance activities on the ground, capacity building projects for the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, and technical assistance on mine victim assistance and mine risk education.

This integrated approach is a key factor for success. The impact of our action on the population is significant not only in terms of safety and well being, but also in terms of local economic opportunities: indeed, once land is cleared from landmines, it is returned to farmers for productive agricultural use.

As we are keen to ensure continuity in the fight against landmines in Lebanon, the Delegation of the European Union recently launched a new call for proposals for more than 8 million Euros to support actions linked to mine clearance, mine victim assistance and mine risk education. Ambitious proposals were submitted and contracts will be awarded very soon to support the effective work of civil society organisations in this field. We also signed recently a new agreement with UNDP, which will enable them to continue their capacity building programme with LMAC.

Lastly, we would like to re-call the urgency for Lebanon to become a State party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, as mentioned in the new EU-Lebanon Action Plan agreed under the European Neighbourhood Policy. We encourage the Lebanese authorities, and in particular the Parliament, to consider the ratification of this Convention. We would also encourage Lebanon to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The full implementation of both Conventions and of existing national legislation would give the necessary final boost needed to rid this country of one of the many remnants of its wartime history.

Thank you for your attention.