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Statement on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Impact of Explosive Contamination in Lebanon

Handicap International strongly condemns the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the devastating humanitarian consequences this practice inflicts on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Lebanon. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in towns and villages predictably causes severe civilian harm, destroys homes and critical infrastructure, and leaves behind explosive contamination that continues to threaten communities long after the fighting stops.

The cumulative consequences for civilians, land, water sources, and the environment can be catastrophic and long-lasting, compounding the suffering of communities already affected by conflict. These patterns of harm must stop.

“Explosive contamination represents far more than physical debris scattered across landscapes. It is a systematic dismantling of community safety, economic stability, and psychological well-being. Agricultural workers are unable to tend to olive groves, livestock cannot graze safely, children are prevented from playing in their usual spaces, and access to water sources remains restricted due to suspected contamination. With this recent escalation of violence, the future will be even worse. The humanitarian cost of explosive weapons in populated areas extends far beyond the immediate moment of attack; it shapes the daily reality of communities for years. As per the Lebanese Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs reports, after the first week of conflict, it was reported there were: 394 fatalities, 1,130 Injuries, and more than 700,000 people were displaced; 117,000 are located in 538 shelters”, said Gary Toombs, Global Land Release Technical Operations Director, HI.

This humanitarian disaster requires an urgent, large-scale emergency response. This includes delivering Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP) messages to ensure that populations affected by the widespread and indiscriminate use of explosive weapons receive essential, life-saving information. These messages will help individuals protect themselves and their families during bombings and in the immediate aftermath, while also providing guidance on how to safely respond to unexploded ordnance (UXO) resulting from attacks.

Beyond the immediate emergency, this current escalation will further increase the already large presence of explosive ordnance in Lebanon, with an estimated 10% failure rate of explosive weapons currently used in Lebanon. The increased presence of explosive contamination across southern Lebanon, Beirut, and the Bekaa Valley will increase serious concerns for emergency response planning and the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. Population movements, particularly as a result of forced evacuation orders issued by Israeli forces, may drive civilians into newly contaminated areas, significantly increasing the risk of accidents. The scale and complexity of this contamination will require an urgent and comprehensive humanitarian response that goes beyond traditional mine action. This will have to include coordinated efforts such as detailed technical surveys, rapid clearance operations, comprehensive explosive ordnance risk education, and robust victim assistance programming. Explosive contamination must therefore be addressed as a key enabler and a central component shaping humanitarian access and aid delivery across affected areas.

The protection of civilians must remain the foremost priority. Respect for international humanitarian law is not optional—it is an obligation.

Handicap International therefore calls on all parties to the conflict to:

- Immediately cease hostilities, which is the only way to ensure effective protection of civilians.
- Take all feasible measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, in full compliance with international humanitarian law. Stop the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas;

- Immediately abide by international humanitarian law and UN Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016), which specifically refers to the bombing of hospitals and health facilities;
- Immediately abide to IHL principles of distinctions and precautions;
- Endorse and implement the Political declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas;
- Support full and unfettered humanitarian access for all international and national NGOs, regardless of the communities they serve and current modalities and areas of operation. Further, the protection of humanitarian actors, in particular local staff, should be prioritized and reaffirmed as an essential component of humanitarian access, to ensure the continuity of the service delivery;
- Create an enabling environment for organizations that conduct clearance operations, risk education activities, and victim assistance programs, including by ensuring rapid registration;
- Build sustainable community knowledge and behavioral change solutions through community focal point training and awareness about the risks posed by the use of explosive weapons by the parties of the conflict, including unexploded ordnance.

Due to the urgency of the situation, we also call donors and UN agencies to:

- Commit humanitarian funding to fully meet existing funding needs and significantly scale up humanitarian mine action activities, i.e. risk education, victim assistance, technical and non-technical surveys, Explosive Ordnance disposal;
- Encourage the use of a comprehensive approach to Armed Violence Reduction that includes:
- risk education about the dangers of explosive weapons and risk mitigation measures;
- victim assistance that offers multi-disciplinary health services, i.e. physical and functional rehabilitation, prosthesis and orthotics (P&O) services, provision of

assistive devices, psychosocial support (PSS), and socio-economic support through emergency distributions and livelihood activities;

- Clearance;
- Facilitation of space to discuss instruments and consequences of violence through community liaison activities
- Recognize that humanitarian mine action is a prerequisite to any immediate or long-term recovery, and ensure that humanitarian mine action activities are more strongly integrated into other sectors.