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**PRESS RELEASE**

**UNIFIL MARKS INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION**

**Naqoura, Lebanon** - The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) marked today the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

At a ceremony at UNIFIL Sector West headquarters in Shama, Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas highlighted UNIFIL's contribution to the effort of demining and its impact on helping to ensure safer and more prosperous lives for the people of south Lebanon.

"Demining activities critically contribute to reduce poverty, raise standards of living and improve lives," Major-General Asarta said. "Land cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance is now being cultivated, bringing social and economic benefits to the local population."

Demonstrations of improvised explosive device disposal as well as static exhibits of explosive ordnance disposal and demining equipment were organized today by de-miners from UNIFIL's Belgian, Cambodian, Chinese, French, Italian and Spanish contingents. Mine awareness boards were displayed in UNIFIL compounds in Naqoura and Shama, and mine awareness leaflets were distributed to residents of Marjayoun, Bint Jbeil, Heniyah and Marwahin.

During 2002–2008, mine clearance in southern Lebanon was coordinated by the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre of Southern Lebanon (UNMACC-SL) as a partnership between the United Nations and the Lebanese Armed Forces. With the transition of coordination authority to the Lebanon Mine Action Centre (LMAC) since January 2009, UNMACC-SL experts now work as integral part of UNIFIL's demining efforts.

As a part of this coordinated effort, UNIFIL demining teams have since 2006 contributed to demining around 4.8 million square metres of affected land and destroyed more than 34,000 unexploded ordnance and mines in southern Lebanon. Besides, UNIFIL regularly conducts activities aimed at raising awareness of the population to the dangers of landmines and other explosive remnants of war.

Mine infestation remains a challenge in southern Lebanon with unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, left over from the 2006 conflict, claiming 28 civilian lives and 263 civilian injuries in the area since the end of the conflict. Besides, during mine clearance operations 14 de-miners including two from UNIFIL have been killed and 49 injured, including five UNIFIL de-miners.

Landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to impact the lives of thousands of people each year in more than 65 countries. This year's commemoration of the Day highlights the work of the mine action sector to save lives and protect livelihoods and celebrate the vigorous movement towards the United Nations vision of a world free from the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

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