

Statement

By

Majdi Ramadan
Counsellor

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Item 63 (a): Promotion and Protection of the Rights
of Children

Item 61 (b): Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special
Session on Children

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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Our thanks also go the Secretary General and the Secretariat for the reports presented under items 63 (a) and (b).

Mr. Chairman,

Lebanon and its children were once again the victims of an Israeli aggression over this past summer. Results of the aggression are frightening with more than 1100 civilians of which were children and more than 4000 injured with many left with permanent disabilities. QanaII, Marwaheen, and Chiaah, are just a few of the massacres that Israel inflicted on the Lebanese children. In the second massacre of Qana Israel killed children with permanent disabilities, many of whom were survivors of the first Qana massacre. 200,000 of the one million people that were forcefully displaced by Israel have yet to return to their homes while many others have returned to destroyed ones. In Beirut, 18,000 children are still camped in "crowded and often unsanitary conditions".

Lebanon's educated population is one of its best known attributes. This is why it is heartbreaking to report that Lebanon's educational sector has suffered around \$70 million in damages. A rapid assessment of the losses in the education sector indicates that close to 50 schools were totally destroyed while around 300 other need repair.

Lebanon's medical services have also suffered a rude blow. 70% of all primary health care in the southern villages of Marjayoun and Bint Jbeil are completely destroyed.

Water systems were totally or partially destroyed in urban and rural areas in South Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut, stranding at least 1.7 million people of which up to 40 percent are children, suffering either temporary breaks or full stoppage of water supply to households.

Yet above and beyond all the damages and tragedies, the biggest risk to the lives of children in South Lebanon is from UXOs; which will take months if not years to clear. This directly harms our children. In the words of Mr. Egelend the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, "what's shocking and I would say, to me, completely immoral, is that 90 percent of the cluster bomb strikes occurred in the last 72 hours of the conflict when we knew there would be a resolution, when we really knew there would be an end to this".

Since the cessation of hostilities, 124 people (and counting) have been killed or wounded by unexploded bombs, mostly sub munitions that landed indiscriminately in civilian areas. Many of these UXOs were designed to look like little toys while others like chocolate bars. In the words of the Secretary General, "even if there is only one mine in the field, it is the kind of weapon that long after the conflict lies they're silently waiting to maim and kill". Unfortunately, we have over a million.

Mr. Chairman,

In the circulated version of this statement, you will find a list of concrete facts and events that exemplify Israel's aggression upon Lebanon's children.

- On the second day of hostilities, Israeli Forces killed 38 civilians in four different attacks, among them 20 children.
- 15 July 2006 and Israeli air strike hit a civilian convoy fleeing from the village of Marwahin killing 21 people including 14 children.
- On 20 July 2006 in Bint Jbeil, the Bint Jbeil Vocational school building, used to shelter hundreds of refugee families, was subjected to an Israeli bombardment.
- On 30 July 2006, the Israeli air force bombed the village of Qana in southern Lebanon, killing 28 civilians including 16 children.
- Of the victims killed in the Qana massacre, some were disabled children that were survivors of the first Qana massacre ten years ago.
- In at least cases Israeli forces attacked individual vehicles and convoys of civilians fleeing their villages after Israeli warnings that the villages would be bombed.
- In at least two cases, Israeli forces fired on humanitarian convoys and Red Cross ambulances.

I will share with you the suffering of one event through the eyes of Robert Fisk the well known reporter based in Lebanon. This is the story of Ali Abdullah from Marwahin. On July 15, Ali was driving a sedan, with an open-topped pick-up behind him, packed with 27 relatives and friends, most of them children hoping to take them to safety in Tyre. Within 15 minutes, 23 of the passengers were dead.

Mohamed Abdullah, the driver's brother, understands the reality of that terrible morning because his 52-year-old wife Zahra, his sons Hadi, aged six, and 15-year-old Wissam, and his daughters, Marwa, aged 10, and 13-year old Myrna, were in the pick-up. Zahra was to die. So were Hadi and the beautiful little girl Myrna whose photograph now haunts the streets of Marwahin. The father Mohamed asked us all this simple question, "Can the international community get me my rights... I was able to build a home in my village for my wife and children... and I did this in 2000, 23 years after I was driven out of Marwahin"

Just down the hill from Marwahin, on the Israeli side stands a tall radio transmission tower, which on the morning of July 15 ordered the villagers to flee their homes.

Ali Abdullah drove north, away from Marwahin when he spotted an Israeli warship and the Israeli naval crew certainly saw Ali's pick-up. The Israelis had been firing at all vehicles on the roads of southern Lebanon for three days - they hit dozens of civilian cars as well as ambulances and never once explained their actions except to claim that they were shooting at "terrorists". At a corner of a road, Ali suddenly realized his vehicle was overheating and he pulled to a halt. This was a dangerous place to break down, and for seven minutes, he tried to restart the pick-up.

According to young Wissam, Ali turned to the children with the words: "Get out, all you children get out and the Israelis will realize we are civilians." The first two or three children had managed to climb out the back when the Israeli warship fired a shell that exploded in the cab of the pick-up, killing Ali and one other instantly. Wissam continues, "I had almost been able to jump from the vehicle before the ship hit us... but the pressure of the explosion blew me out... There was blood everywhere."

Within a few seconds, Wissam recalls how an Israeli Apache helicopter arrived over the vehicle, very low and hovering just above the children. He states, "I saw Myrna still in the pick-up and she was crying and pleading for help. I went to get her and that's when the helicopter hit us. Its missile hit the back of the vehicle where all the children were and I couldn't hear anything because the blast had damaged my ears. Then the helicopter fired a rocket into the car behind the pick-up. But the pilot must have seen what he was doing. He could see we were mostly children. The pick-up didn't have a roof. All the children were crammed in the back and clearly visible."

Wissam talks slowly but without tears as he describes what happened next. "I lost sight of Myrna. I just couldn't see her any more for the dust flying around. Then the helicopter came back and started firing its guns at the children, at any of them who moved. I ran away behind a small hill and laid there and pretended to be dead because I knew the pilot would kill me if I moved. Some of the children were in bits". Only four survived, as Wissam and his sister Marwa "played dead" amid the corpses.

The father, Muhamed asked again, "Is Israel in a state of war with children? How can I lose my children and then see the Israelis here?"

Finally, I would like to take this moment to extend our warmest and most heartfelt thanks to UNICEF whose staff has demonstrated true heroism by supporting Lebanese children even at their own risk. UNICEF was the first to provide humanitarian aid to the city of Tyre and UNICEF personnel had literally to cross rivers on foot carrying aid because the bridges and overpasses were destroyed by Israel.

Thank you.