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PRESS RELEASE

Montreal, May 16, 2007 - A week before States gather in Lima, Peru, to discuss a draft text of a new treaty to ban cluster munitions, Handicap International releases a new report on the impact of cluster munitions on the lives of people in 25 countries. Ninety-eight percent of people killed or injured by cluster sub-munitions are civilians living in the aftermath of war. This is just one critical finding in *Circle of Impact: The Fatal Footprint of Cluster Munitions on People and Communities*. The report is the result of several years of research done by HI, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning international organization that has worked for more than 25 years to assist the disabled and eliminate post-war injuries from landmines and cluster munitions.

Cluster munitions, which are weapons that release several hundred smaller submunitions when fired, pose an unacceptable danger to civilians both during and long after a conflict. These submunitions often fail to explode as they are spread over an area the size of several football fields, creating a highly lethal footprint.

This February, at the Oslo Process convention signing, at least 55 countries including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and Afghanistan began taking steps toward prohibiting cluster munitions. A total of 13,306 deaths from cluster submunitions are confirmed. As 96 percent of deaths occur in countries where there is limited or no data collection, however, there are undoubtedly more casualties. In high-use areas such as Iraq, there were more than 1,000 casualties during strikes and more than 4,000 casualties in Lao PDR after strikes.

Around the world, the way in which cluster bomb victims are injured or killed reflects their livelihood activities. In Afghanistan boys between five and fourteen who are tending animals are most likely to become cluster munitions casualties. In Laos over 1,000 people were killed by submunitions while weeding or sowing crops in their own fields. Such trends are common across all 24 countries examined in the report.

In many cases people knowingly enter contaminated areas out of economic necessity. In southern Lebanon cluster munitions contaminate approximately 90% of the land used for farming. The contamination of essential land is reflected in the rise of cluster bomb casualties from two per year prior to 2006 to two per day in the months following the July-August 2006 conflict with Israel.

In Iraq, the repeated use of cluster bombs has left a devastating legacy that continues to severely restrict the lives of its people. More than 4,000 civilians have been killed or injured by failed cluster munitions since the end of the Gulf War in 1991, with 60% of post-strike casualties being children. Today, in the south and south-central parts of the country, the vast majority of people continue to report blocked access to essential agricultural (88%) and pasture land (92%) due to cluster munitions. This contamination of land crucial to family income has meant that nearly 46% of the recent casualties in the region have been the breadwinners of their family.

Handicap International's report comes just one week before States gather in Lima, Peru (23-25 May), to continue to discuss a draft text of a new treaty to ban cluster munitions. Since the failure of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), this past February's Oslo Process has seen 46 countries, including Canada, sign onto an initiative towards a prohibition on cluster munitions. The Oslo conference declaration in February affirmed the plan "to forbid the use, production, transfer or storage of cluster bombs, whose indiscriminate injuries to civilians is

inexcusable". Although initially reluctant to ratify such an agreement, Canada lent its complete support and confirmed its participation to Lima.

Rae McGrath, International Spokesperson on Cluster Munitions for the Handicap International network, adds "*Circle of Impact should remove any lingering doubt which governments may have regarding the disproportionate nature of cluster munitions. It is an offence against all humanitarian norms to continue using these weapons with such evidence of their impact available*".

Circle of Impact: The Fatal Footprint of Cluster Munitions on People and Communities is the definitive comprehensive study systematically analyzing the impact of cluster munitions on civilian populations through casualty data and socioeconomic impact profiles. It utilizes information available on casualties of cluster submunitions and cluster munitions strike data to track the human impact from the initial cluster munitions strike, over the short-term emergency phase, to the post-conflict period, which affect the lives of individuals, families and communities for generations.

Handicap International is a non-governmental, non-religious and non-political organization that works with people with disabilities in a variety of contexts to offer them assistance and support in their efforts to become self-reliant. Since its creation, this non-profit organization has set up programs in about 60 countries and has provided aid in many emergency situations. It has offices in the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Canada since 2003. These offices provide human and financial resources, manage humanitarian projects and raise awareness about the issue. HI is a co-founder of the Cluster Munitions Coalition and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Full report available at <http://en.handicapinternational.be/index.php?action=article&numero=467>

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