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PRESS RELEASE

Civilians at work killed and injured in five regions of the world First worldwide study on cluster munitions casualties

Montreal/Ottawa, November 2nd, 2006 – The recent conflict in Lebanon as well as the ceaseless fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan compels us to recognize the severe humanitarian consequences of cluster submunitions. Civilians constitute 98 percent of all recorded cluster submunitions casualties, many of them injured or killed while carrying out their normal, daily livelihood activities in places they go to every day, according to *Fatal Footprint: The Global Human Impact of Cluster Munitions*. This groundbreaking preliminary report by Handicap International (HI) is an unprecedented effort to document the impact of cluster munitions on the lives of people in 24 countries and areas which are confirmed to be affected by cluster munitions.

Cluster munitions are imprecise weapons designed to strike a large surface area. They scatter small, highly lethal submunitions which create a 'footprint' within which they indiscriminately kill and injure military targets and civilians. Yet unlike during the initial blast, the effects of unexploded submunitions remaining after the strike do seem more discriminate. "Most of the victims are civilians – men, women and children – who returned to their communities after a devastating conflict without realizing that the conflict is far from being over. Indeed, as with anti-personnel landmines, unexploded submunitions prolong the impact of war long after it's officially been over", claimed Nancy DeGraff, Director of Handicap International Canada.

Three decades after their use, cluster submunitions continue to cause nearly half of the explosive remnants of war casualties in Southeast Asia. In some parts of Iraq, cluster submunitions casualties represent between 75 and 80 percent of casualties. "It is clear that cluster submunitions continue to cause disproportional long-term civilian harm, spreading through new conflicts to destroy lives, disrupt communities and deny vulnerable populations' access to resources needed for economic recovery," says Ms. Habbouba Aoun, Coordinator of the Landmine Resource Centre (Lebanon).

Therefore, immediate and comprehensive clearance is the only way to minimize casualties. Lebanon has been in the spotlight recently but there are numerous other countries confronted by this contamination and whose populations receive limited assistance while the number of victims continues to increase.

Despite intermittent international interest and eloquent verbal protests, governments and the international community have – for the last 30 years – failed to address the lasting humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. "The international community must negotiate a new treaty to prevent proliferation and to stop further use of the billions of cluster

submunitions currently stockpiled, as the only way to prevent untold numbers of needless civilian casualties in future” says Mr. Stan Brabant, Head of Handicap International’s Policy Unit.

“We welcome this much-needed report by Handicap International, one of our members in Canada and partners internationally that confirms the pattern of consistent harm to civilians in every instance in which they have been used”, said Paul Hannon, Executive Director of Mines Action Canada, a coalition of Canadian NGOs committed to eliminating the humanitarian suffering caused by victim-activated weapons such as clusters and anti-personnel landmines. “While we cannot reverse the consequences of the use of cluster munitions in Lebanon or the other 23 affected areas, we can prevent future suffering caused by these weapons by creating new international law to control their use. At minimum, Canada needs to change its own policies so that it will never use cluster munitions or any other type of victim-activated weapon.”

Fatal Footprint is the first comprehensive study systematically analyzing the impact of cluster munitions on civilian populations through casualty data. It utilizes the limited information available on casualties of cluster submunitions to track the human impact from the initial cluster munitions strikes, over the short-term emergency phase, to the post-conflict period, which can affect the lives of individuals, families and communities for generations.

Fatal Footprint: The Global Human Impact of Cluster Munitions and related documents are available online at: <http://www.handicapinternational.be>

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