Unexploded ordnance threatens Lebanese population, says UN

John Zarocostas *Geneva*

Thousands of items of unexploded ordnance, in particular cluster munitions, pose a serious threat to the war torn population of Lebanon and are killing and injuring civilians daily. This is the warning of the United Nation's humanitarian coordinator in Lebanon, David Shearer.

Since the ceasefire, one person is killed and three people are injured a day by ordnance of all types, Mr Shearer said.

As of 30 August, a total of 61 people had been affected by ordnance, 13 killed and 48 injured, mostly from cluster munitions, according to UN figures.

Mr Shearer said that the most dangerous and most threatening are the more than 100 000 unexploded cluster "bomblets" dropped in the last days of the war in towns and in the countryside in southern Lebanon.

The scattered bomblets are also posing a serious obstacle to refugees who fled the fighting who are now returning to their houses and fields. Unlike antipersonnel mines, cluster munitions

are not subject to a global ban.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has entered into partnership with the UN Mine Action Service to expedite the clearing of unexploded munitions and speed the return of refugees.

"These bombs are extremely dangerous because they are very unstable and can be set off merely by vibration," Mr Shearer said. He added that they had so far discovered more than 400 sites where cluster bombs had been used.

The cluster munitions used by the Israeli armed forces in the conflict are estimated to have a failure rate of 40%, and other ordnance, such as artillery shells, mortars, and bombs, have a failure rate of about 10%, experts say.

More than 100 people from the UN's mine action coordination cell, part of the UN Mine Action Service, are in Lebanon, and they have destroyed more than 2900 submunitions.

Simon Conway, a British expert in clearing mines and director of the advocacy group Landmine Action, said that "the

A field manager from the Mine Advisory Group investigates a cluster bomblet found in Tibnin, southern Lebanon

scale of cluster munition contamination is much greater than we've seen in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq," according to experts on the ground in Lebanon.

But UN officials and experts fear that the number of casualties of unexploded bombs could continue to rise. They are increasing the identification, marking, and clearance of affected sites. They are also launching training in mine awareness for children.

The UN coordinator says that clearing the cluster bombs could take up to 15 months.

However, Mr Conway, who has cleared mines elsewhere, said, "I'm afraid it will not take a year to clear. We'll be clearing cluster munitions from the rubble of the villages of southern Lebanon for another decade. That's the grim reality."

Mr Shearer said that the \$940m (£490m; €730m) raised at the Lebanon recovery donor conference on 31 August—almost twice what government was looking for—was an important "moral boost" for the Lebanese government. □

Roche employee wins partial victory

Madeline Brettingham *London*

A former senior manager at the pharmaceutical giant Roche has won her claim for unfair dismissal. But it is only a partial victory because a secondary claim of whistle blowing was not upheld.

Dr Ryta Kuzel, a former head of UK regulatory affairs at the company, which manufactures Herceptin (trastuzumab), Tamiflu (oseltamivir), and Lariam (mefloquine), launched legal proceedings against the firm after they escorted her from the company's premises in March 2005.

The tribunal's written judgment described Mike Doherty, Roche's head of regulatory affairs, as acting in an "autocratic and irrational manner" and said they were confused as to why Dr

Kuzel's actions had justified her sacking. They added that Mr Doherty's loss of temper appeared out of character.

They continued by saying that the decision "has had a catastrophic effect on Dr Kuzel and her career" and called it "a serious disregard of the statutory disciplinary procedures by a major employer."

However, Dr Kuzel was unsuccessful in her secondary claim, made under the Public Interest Disclosure Act, that she had been sacked from Roche for whistle blowing.

Roche had previously claimed that Dr Kuzel was sacked after a breakdown of communication with senior colleagues. The company's counsel accused her of bringing about "a breakdown in mutual trust."

But she had told a previous hearing that she believed she had been fired after raising the alarm over Roche's involvement with a network of Derbyshire slimming clinics (*BMJ* 2006;332:441), a

claim which Roche has always denied (*BMJ* 2006;332:1175).

In 2005, Roche helped an investigation by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency after it emerged that the company had been supplying quantities of the weight loss drug Xenical (orlistat) worth £80 000 (£120 000; \$150 000) a month to a slimming clinic based in a converted corner shop in Derbyshire.

It emerged that there were considerable concerns about the legitimacy of the operation. The agency later cleared Roche of wrong doing in connection with the case, however. The agency has confirmed that the investigation into the clinic is ongoing.

Dr Kuzel, who has previously held senior posts at SmithKline Beecham and Pharmacia, is now working as a consultant for Johnson & Johnson.

She alleges that she has suffered serious damage to her reputation as a result of Roche's actions. "My dismissal and fight

for justice has damaged my marketability. The nature of my dismissal has damaged my reputation," she told the tribunal.

Roche dispute this. A spokesperson added, "We accept the tribunal's ruling. We have acknowledged from the outset that the correct process for dismissing the claimant was not followed.

"However we are pleased that the tribunal recognised that the claimant was not dismissed because she raised regulatory concerns. We have always maintained that this was not the case. Roche takes its regulatory obligations very seriously and has a good track record of doing so."

After the hearing, Dr Kuzel said, "I'm pleased that I've been successful and that I've been exonerated and vindicated. That was the purpose of being here."

She is now pursuing reinstatement in her former post. The issue of compensation, likely to be in the region of £55 000 if awarded, has yet to be settled. □