

Israel-Lebanon: Accident reveals newly laid Israeli mines, UN says

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The Israeli army sowed landmines in south Lebanon during its summer conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the United Nations said on 25 November.

The claims came after British and Bosnian bomb disposal experts each had a foot amputated after a newly laid Israeli-made anti-personnel landmine exploded on Friday, according to a statement by the UN's Mine Action Coordination Centre in South Lebanon (UNMACC SL).

Israel has not yet established whether its forces laid landmines in Lebanon during its recent conflict, officials speaking on condition of anonymity at the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) told IRIN.

An IDF official said that the mine that caused the injuries could have been laid by Hezbollah or Syria.

"The whole area is full of mines from different countries so these specific injuries could have been caused by mines laid by Hezbollah or Syria. If the mine was laid by the IDF, it is not certain that it was laid during the last conflict," she said.

The mine clearance men were working in the village of Deir Mimas, three kilometres northwest of the Israeli border. They were helping to clear some of the estimated one million unexploded cluster bomblets fired by Israel during the conflict. A Lebanese team member also suffered light injuries in the blast.

The men were on the way to investigate an explosion that had killed four goats and left a shepherd stranded when they triggered the mine and it blew up, the UN said. The shepherd was unharmed.

An UN MACC team sent to the site found the area to be contaminated with Israeli Number 4 anti-personnel landmines.

The mines were laid during the 2006 conflict, according to UNMACC.

"This is the first evidence we have that the Israeli Forces laid new mines in south Lebanon in 2006," the statement said.

The three injured men worked for Armor Group, a UK-based global risk management service funded by the United Arab Emirates to help clear unexploded cluster bomblets.

So far, more than 60,000 cluster bombs have been cleared and destroyed without any casualties being suffered by the teams working with MACC SL. Israel is currently investigating its use of cluster bombs in its 34-day war with Hezbollah.

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