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Print Page

'Entire Villages Were Cluster-Bombed'

Agence France Presse —

JERUSALEM, 14 September 2006 — Israel's Army dropped more than 1.2 million cluster bombs on Lebanon during the monthlong conflict, the Haaretz newspaper reported yesterday, citing an Israeli Army officer.

The unidentified officer described his unit's use of the controversial bomblets during Israel's 34-day offensive as "crazy and monstrous."

"We covered entire villages with cluster bombs," the newspaper quoted the commander as saying.

The 1.2 million cluster bombs cited by the commander only included those bomblets dropped by a Multiple Launch Rocket System. Additional cluster bombs were fired from 155mm mortars or dropped from the air, he said.

Other soldiers cited in the article said the army fired phosphorous shells to start fires in Lebanon.

The Red Cross says international law prohibits the use of phosphorous against people.

Human rights organizations have long advocated a ban on cluster bombs because a lot of them do not explode on impact and create vast minefields where civilians are at risk of losing lives and limbs decades after a war is over.

A spokeswoman for the Israeli Army denied the army had violated international law. "All the weapons and munitions used by the army are legal under international law and their use conforms with international standards," she said.

In the first 15 days after the Aug. 14 cease-fire in the Lebanon war, 52 Lebanese civilians were killed by cluster bombs, according to the United Nations.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has condemned Israel's use of cluster bombs and the world body estimates that as much as 40 percent of the apple-sized bomblets fired into Lebanon failed to explode on impact.

The UN has found that Israel dropped 90 percent of all the cluster bombs it used in Lebanon in the three days immediately preceding the cease-fire.

Annan has criticized Israel for failing to provide UN peacekeepers working to clear away unexploded ordnance with adequately detailed maps of where Israel dropped the cluster bombs.

During a visit to southern Lebanon immediately after the war, Marc Garlasco, a senior military analyst for the New York-based Human Rights Watch, said Israel's cluster bomb use in Lebanon had "been taken to a new level." "I've never been anywhere where I saw these numbers of duds lying around," Garlasco, a former Pentagon analyst, said.

The Geneva Conventions ban the use of the weapons that do not pass the proportionality test, under which civilian harm cannot outweigh military advantage.

The Haaretz report came as a top general resigned over the Lebanon war. Maj. Gen. Udi Adam, who led Israel's Northern Command during the offensive, submitted his resignation to army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz as a storm of criticism over the war looked set to spill over into a second month.

"The chief of staff has accepted Adam's request and he will be replaced in accordance with military procedures," the army said.

The war left 162 Israelis dead and failed to achieve its two main objectives: retrieving two soldiers captured by Hezbollah in a raid on July 12 and halting a barrage of rocket attacks by the group.

Israel was heavily criticized by the international community for its devastating use of force in Lebanon, where

more than 1,200 people were killed and thousands of homes and infrastructure destroyed.