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## How a bomblet took a teen's leg - and is slowly killing her father

***'I wish there were no war ... that israel would not drop death from the sky upon us'***

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**By Nichole Sobecki**

Special to The Daily Star

MAARAKE: Almost a year has passed since the summer 2006 war with Israel, but for Rasha Mohammad Zayoun, 18, a return to normality is not an option. One evening almost three months ago, Rasha lost her left leg when her father unknowingly brought a cluster bomb into their home among a bush of thyme.

"I felt a deep pain and then I noticed that my leg was gone," Rasha told The Daily Star.

Cluster munitions are anti-personnel weapons that scatter tiny but deadly bomblets over a wide area. The munitions, 4 million of which were spread across South Lebanon by Israeli forces - including about 1 million that failed to detonate - have caused 30 deaths and 180 injuries among civilians since the end of the war, according to the United Nations Mine Action Center.

The unexploded cluster munitions have turned homes, livelihoods and public places into de facto minefields.

"It is God who provides for us," said Rasha's mother, gesturing angrily. "It's misery, we cannot provide for our children." She is quick to criticize Rasha yet dedicated to her despite the difficult circumstances.

Since Rasha's accident, which required two months of hospitalization, multiple surgeries and advanced medical care to straighten her shattered bones enough to provide her with a prosthetic, the family's meager income (\$30 per month prior to the war) has become increasingly stretched. Rasha's father has rarely made it to work for the past several months and his shrunken frame testifies to a period of rapid weight loss.

The neighbors whisper among themselves that he will not last long. "Three months at the most," one neighbor said.

Most attributed his situation to an overwhelming sense of guilt that seems to cast its shadow on the entire family.

"When she used to be able to walk and be with her friends, her smile was always on her face," Rasha's mother said. "Now she sits alone and cries. She tells me, 'My friends walk on their legs, I cannot walk anymore.' She blames us because we brought the cluster bomb into the house. I try to tell her it was a mistake, but what does that matter now?"

For some, Rasha's story does carry larger implications. Almost 50 countries will

meet in Lima, Peru, from May 23-25 to discuss the draft of a treaty to ban the weapons, which have been used widely in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Russian region of Chechnya. But major cluster-bomb-producing states, including the US, Russia and China, have made clear they oppose a blanket ban, arguing that they need to keep the option of using the weapon for defense.

"I wish there were no war, that there will not be another war, that Israel would not drop death from the sky upon us," said Rasha's mother. "But what can I say? We talk and talk and it is useless."

Although the lack of action by major foreign powers is a common lament, sanctions against Israel for misusing the weapons would not be unprecedented. The Reagan administration imposed a six-year ban on cluster-weapon sales to Israel in 1982 after a Congressional investigation found that Israel had used the weapons in civilian areas during its invasion of Lebanon that year.

While those in power alternately debate and ignore the issue of cluster munitions and their ramifications, Rasha continues to struggle each day against a permanent injury.

"She will not marry - who will take her?" asked her mother. "I wish only that she will be given another leg so that she can walk again, that is all that I hope from God, to see her walk alongside her friends one more time."

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