

Cluster bomb victims to get more services

AIN SAADEH: Thousands of Lebanese wounded by landmines and cluster munitions stand to benefit from greater assistance after a local non-governmental organization on Friday launched a regional program to provide survivors with rehabilitation services and prosthetic limbs.

Al-Kafaat Foundation launched the "REHAB" project in Ain Saadeh under the patronage of Social Affairs Minister Mario Aoun and Canadian Ambassador to Lebanon Martial Pagé. The project to provide thousands of survivors with free rehabilitation services, psychotherapy and artificial limbs will be run in partnership with the Canadian College of Montmorency and with funding from the Canadian Agency of International Development. REHAB will also provide training in prosthetics production, physiotherapy and psychology, and will establish several mobile rehabilitation units, said President of Al-Kafaat's Board of Trustees Ramez Aouad. Al-Kafaat, meaning 'abilities' in Arabic, already provides medical, educational, employment and rehabilitation services to over 4,500 Lebanese beneficiaries.

During the 34-day with Israel in 2006, the Jewish state dropped around four million cluster bombs over South Lebanon, mostly during the conflict's final 72 hours. Around 500,000 of those munitions did not explode, and have killed or seriously injured some 213 civilians and 52 deminers since the conflict ended. Landmines dating back from Israel's occupation and from Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war also remain scattered. "Today there are over 2 million anti-personnel mines [including cluster munitions] in the South of Lebanon and the Bekaa that continue to make more victims every day," said Al Kafaat in a



Page (far left), Al-Kafaat's Director Raif Shwayri (second left) and Aoun (center) present Montmorency College Director Denyse Blanchet an honorary plaque in recognition of the college's work.

press statement Friday. "In the face of this sad reality and human catastrophe, Al Kafaat has decided to act." Demining remained the top priority for Lebanon, said Sylvain Benoit, Director of Montmorency College. "So long as there are still mines, there will still be victims," he said. The push to ban landmines was especially important for the Canadian government, Benoit added, as it was signed there in 1997.

"Lebanon has seen a lot of war," Aoun said at the press conference, stressing the importance of rehabilitating victims of those wars. "Lebanon thanks the Canadian government for its active involvement in the REHAB project and wishes Al-Kafaat and Montmorency success." The REHAB project in Lebanon is part of a wider program extending support to victims of cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines in Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Al-Kafaat's latest initiative came two days after an Israeli media report claimed the Jewish state intended to hand over a database identifying the locations of cluster munitions it fired over South Lebanon during the

July 2006 war to UN peacekeepers in the near future. But Media and Post Clearance officer for the UN's Mine Action Coordination Center Dalya Farran said nothing official had yet been received. "We still need the cluster bomb site data and we hope that the Israelis will provide it," she said. - *The Daily Star*