

August 16, 2006

Condoleeza Rice
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a relief, development and peacebuilding agency of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in the United States and Canada. For almost 60 years, MCC has worked in the Middle East, walking with refugees; partnering with local Christian, Muslim and Jewish groups; and seeking to encourage local peace initiatives.

MCC is partnering with the Middle East Council of Churches to develop environmentally-friendly farming practices in southern Lebanon. Given our work there, we are keenly aware of the devastation and loss of life caused by the recent war, as well as the painful history of conflict between Israel and Lebanon in that region.

We are writing to urge you not to proceed with the sale of M26 artillery rockets to Israel (New York Times, August 11, 2006) because of the grave consequences to human life, not only during times of conflict but in the years that follow.

MCC is well aware of the tragic long-term impact of cluster munitions because of our work in Laos and Iraq. Cluster munitions are difficult to target, cover a wide area, and are particularly prone to malfunction. Cluster strikes inevitably leave behind the effect of an unmarked mine field that continues to maim and kill long after conflicts are over. Tragically, these unexploded submunitions are particularly attractive to curious children who often pick them up, thinking they may make a good toy.

It is well-known that cluster munitions cause immediate harm to civilians when used in populated areas. Perhaps less understood is the equally devastating impact that cluster munitions have on rural life. The air war in Laos (1964-1973) was conducted in very rural and mountainous areas. As villagers returned to their homes after the war and began to work in their fields and gardens, the sad toll of casualties began and continues to this day. All the normal activities of rural life, such as tilling the soil, gathering firewood, herding cattle, burning brush, digging for traditional medicine, building irrigation canals, and fishing in the streams became highly dangerous because of the presence of unexploded cluster munitions.

We believe any use of M26 rockets and submunitions by Israel in southern Lebanon would result in a tragic loss of human life for years to come, whether used in cities, villages or rural areas. The use of these weapons which have a well-documented failure rate could well fuel the impulses of those ready to use violence and terror for years to come.

In a letter to President Bush on July 26, 2006, MCC US Board Chair Harriet Sider Bicksler stated that violence is not “a viable strategy for building peace and security.” Because of our Christian faith we do not support violence as a solution by any party to the conflict. We are particularly disturbed by the potential use of cluster munitions because of their indiscriminate nature and long-term impact. We urge you to use your good offices to stop the sale of cluster munitions to Israel.

May God’s wisdom and courage be with you during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Rolando Santiago, Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee US

CC: Stephen Hadley, National Security Advisor
Senator Arlen Specter
Senator Rick Santorum
Representative Joseph Pitts
Senator Patrick Leahy
Representative Earl Blumenauer
Representative Lane Evans

Harriet Sider Bicksler, Chair, Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Robert Davis, PhD Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee
Donald Peters, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee Canada
Rick and Jan Janzen, Mennonite Central Committee
Ken and Kathryn Seitz, Mennonite Central Committee