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Israel/Lebanon: Further evidence of grave violations in Israel-Hizbullah conflict underlines urgent need for UN inquiry

Amnesty International today renewed its call for a comprehensive and independent UN-led inquiry into violations of international humanitarian law committed during this year's Israel-Hizbullah conflict.

The call came as the organisation published its latest and concluding report into violations committed during the conflict. The report focuses on Israeli attacks in which civilians were killed as well as the impact on civilians of other attacks by Israeli forces. It also examines allegations that Hizbullah used civilians as "human shields".

"A full, impartial UN-led inquiry that includes provision for reparations to the victims is urgently needed. Anything less would not only be a gross betrayal of the civilian victims, more than one thousand of whom were killed, but also a recipe for further civilian bloodshed with impunity," said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa programme.

"More than three months have now gone by since the ceasefire and to Amnesty International's knowledge neither side has even begun investigations into the grave violations committed during last summer's conflict."

Amnesty International's report, *Israel/Lebanon, Out of all proportion – civilians bear the brunt of the war*, concludes that Israeli forces carried out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, such as the sustained artillery bombardment of south Lebanon. Of particular concern was the widespread use of cluster bombs in civilian areas in the last days of fighting, leaving a lethal legacy that continues to blight civilian lives. Other attacks indicate that Israeli forces consistently failed to adopt necessary precautionary measures to avoid civilian casualties.

In addition, public statements by Israeli leaders and leaflets dropped into Lebanon show that Israeli forces effectively considered civilians travelling in south Lebanon to be a military target. Any attack carried out to implement such a policy would have amounted to an indiscriminate attack, and possibly a direct attack against civilians.

The report also examines Israeli allegations that Hizbullah's fighters used civilians as "human shields". Evidence seen by Amnesty International suggests that, in some cases, Hizbullah stored Katyusha rockets within villages and fired from civilian areas. However, it is not apparent that civilians were present and

used as "human shields" in the instances examined. Nor does evidence examined by Amnesty International substantiate Israeli allegations that Hizbullah prevented civilians from fleeing areas under attack.

In a previous report, Amnesty International concluded that Hizbullah carried out indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians in its rocket bombardment of northern Israel.

Based on field research conducted in Lebanon and Israel in July, August and September 2006, the report includes evidence from interviews with victims; meetings with Israeli and Lebanese military and government officials, as well as senior Hizbullah officials; information from non-governmental groups; and official statements and media reports.

The report's other main findings include the following:

Ambulances were attacked in Israeli strikes and humanitarian organizations were forced to abandon rescue attempts or delivery of humanitarian assistance even after receiving clearance from Israeli authorities.

Attacks by Israeli forces on Lebanese infrastructure and the imposition of an air and sea blockade seem to have been intended as a form of collective punishment as well as to cause harm to Hizbullah's operations.

Convoys of civilians were bombed by Israeli forces while they were fleeing villages and towns in southern Lebanon in compliance with Israeli orders to evacuate the area.

Civilians, particularly children, continue to be killed and injured even after the end of the conflict as a result of Israel's widespread use of cluster bombs in civilian areas that left around a million unexploded cluster bomblets scattered across Lebanon.

The Israeli authorities regularly expressed regret for civilian casualties but have given no or inadequate explanations for specific attacks, such as the intended target, considerations of proportionality and any precautionary measures taken. When they indicated that civilian casualties were the result of mistakes, they provided no indication that anyone had been or would be held accountable for the mistakes.

No investigation into violations of international humanitarian law by Hizbullah is known to have been conducted by Hizbullah commanders or by the Lebanese authorities.

Inquiries completed by four independent UN human rights experts and the current Commission of Inquiry set up by the UN Human Rights Council have been limited in scope and operated under significant restrictions of time and resources.

Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations to set up an international commission empowered to investigate the evidence of violations of international law by both Hizbullah and Israel, and to make provision for reparations for the victims. The organization is also calling for an arms embargo on both sides, and an immediate moratorium on cluster weapons.

Note to editors

An Amnesty International delegation led by the organization's Secretary General Irene Khan will visit Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories from 2 to 11 December. The delegation will meet with government and political leaders as well as members of the civil society to discuss issues raised by the Israeli-Hizbullah conflict and also the ongoing human rights crisis in the Occupied Territories. Further details will be available nearer the time.

For a copy of the report, *Israel/Lebanon, Out of all proportion – civilians bear the brunt of the war*, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde020332006>

The following recent Amnesty International reports are also available:

Under fire - Hizbullah's attacks on northern Israel, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde020252006>

Deliberate destruction or 'collateral damage'? Israeli attacks against civilian infrastructure, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde180072006>

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