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Israel/Lebanon: Hizbullah's deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians

Hizbullah committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes, in its deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians during the recent conflict, according to a briefing published today by Amnesty International.

Combined with the organisation's earlier publication on Israel's targeting of Lebanese civilian infrastructure, the latest findings make clear the urgent need for the UN to establish a full and impartial investigation into violations committed by both sides in the conflict.

During the month-long conflict, Hizbullah fired nearly 4,000 rockets into northern Israel, killing 43 civilians, seriously injuring 33 others and forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to take refuge in shelters or flee. Around a quarter of all rockets were fired directly into urban areas, including rockets packed with thousands of metal ball bearings.

In meetings with Amnesty International, Hizbullah argued that its rocket attacks on northern Israel were a reprisal for Israeli attacks on civilians in Lebanon and were aimed at stopping such attacks.

"The scale of Hizbullah's attacks on Israeli cities, towns and villages, the indiscriminate nature of the weapons used, and statements from the leadership confirming their intent to target civilians, make it all too clear that Hizbullah violated the laws of war," said Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan.

"The fact that Israel has also committed serious violations in no way justifies violations by Hizbullah. Civilians must not be made to pay the price for unlawful conduct on either side."

The briefing, *Under fire - Hizbullah's attacks on northern Israel*, is based on Amnesty International field research in Israel and Lebanon, interviews with victims, official statements, discussions with Israeli and Lebanese government officials and senior Hizbullah officials.

Amnesty International's briefing includes evidence of:

- Hizbullah's firing of some 900 inherently inaccurate Katyusha rockets into urban areas in northern Israel in clear violation of the principle of distinction between civilian and military targets under international law;
- Hizbullah's use of modified Katyusha rockets packed with metal ball bearings, designed to inflict

maximum death and injury; one such rocket killing eight railway workers;
Statements from Hasan Nasrallah and other senior Hizbullah leaders that the group intended to target civilians as a form of reprisal, violating the prohibition on direct attacks on civilians as well as the prohibition on reprisals against the civilian population;
The flight of civilians from northern Israel and the existence of shelters preventing a higher death toll than the 43 civilian fatalities recorded.

"In the conflict between Hizbullah and Israel, the suffering of civilians on both sides has been repeatedly ignored with those responsible escaping all accountability. Justice is urgently needed if respect for the rules of war is ever to be taken seriously -- and that means accountability for the perpetrators of war crimes and reparations for the victims," said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International is calling for a comprehensive, independent and impartial inquiry to be urgently established by the UN into violations of international humanitarian law by both sides in the conflict. It should examine in particular the impact of this conflict on the civilian population, and should be undertaken with a view to holding individuals responsible for crimes under international law and ensuring that full reparation is provided to the victims.

Further aspects of the war, including charges that Hizbullah used Lebanese civilians as a cover and attacks by Israeli forces that resulted in heavy civilian casualties, will be addressed in future publications.

For a copy of the briefing, *Under fire - Hizbullah's attacks on northern Israel*, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde020252006>

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