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Lebanon: Killing of Samir Qasir: need for independent investigation and for freedom of expression to be respected

Amnesty International calls for the Lebanese authorities to launch an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the killing this morning of journalist Samir Qasir, who died in a car bomb explosion in front of his house in Ashrafiyeh, east Beirut. One other person was injured. Samir Qasir, 45, a professor at Université Saint Josef and a prominent writer for *an-Nahar* newspaper, was renowned for his critical writing including of the Lebanese authorities and Syria's activities in Lebanon. The organisation urges all political groups to respect freedom of expression in the country and to refrain from acts of violence against civilians.

In October 1997 Samir Qasir agreed to sit on a panel in Beirut for the launch of Amnesty International's first report on Lebanon, a testimony to his bravery at a time when people were particularly cautious about associating themselves with the organisation or otherwise criticising human rights abuses in the country. Ever since, Samir Qasir has remained a supporter of Amnesty International and its work in the region, and in 2000 he assisted in a training session it organised for young journalists on human rights standards and the media. In 2000/2001 Samir Qasir was harassed by the Lebanese police and his passport confiscated for a period of time because of his critical articles, published by *an-Nahar*.

The explosion that killed Samir Qasir is at least the sixth to have occurred since the bomb that killed former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and more than 20 others on 14 February.

Amnesty International expresses its sorrow at the killing of Samir Qasir and sends condolences to his family and colleagues.