

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 02/01/99

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 15 per section.

UA

Fear for

ISRAEL/LEBANON Civilians in Lebanon and Israel

Amnesty International fears that bombing attacks on Lebanon threatened by Israel may lead to indiscriminate killings of civilians in violation of international humanitarian law. The organization also calls on *Hizbullah* not to carry out indiscriminate rocket attacks on civilian areas of Israel.

Attacks by *Hizbullah* and other armed groups against the Israeli forces who occupy part of South Lebanon have escalated. Seven Israeli soldiers have been killed over the past week, four of them, including a general and a journalist for Israel's army radio, in a roadside bomb on 28 February 1999.

In response, Israeli planes have attacked targets in Lebanon, including the Bekaa Valley and Baalbek. No casualties have yet been reported. The Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu stated at a press conference on 28 February that warplanes were "being careful not to cause any civilian casualties". However, Israeli attacks against armed groups or their bases have, in the past, caused civilian casualties. On 22 December 1998 a woman and her seven children were killed in what Israel said was a "human error" when the pilot "was mistaken about the target". In 1996 more than 100 civilians were unlawfully killed in an Israeli attack that hit Lebanese refugees sheltering in the Qana UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) compound.

Fear of civilian casualties is heightened by the fact that, for the first time since the "Grapes of Wrath" attacks in April 1996, when 150 civilians were killed by Israeli assaults, the Voice of the South radio, run by the South Lebanon Army (SLA), Israel's proxy militia in South Lebanon, has urged residents to monitor the radio for warnings of shelling.

The Israeli cabinet is also reported to be considering attacks on Lebanese targets such as power stations and water works in order to force the Lebanese Government to take action against *Hizbullah*. International humanitarian law prohibits attacks which, although aimed at a legitimate military target, have an indiscriminate or disproportionate impact on civilians. International humanitarian law also prohibits attacks against civilian sites indispensable to the survival of the civilian population such as water installations and supplies. Such sites may not be attacked even in reprisal.

Israel reported that mortars had been fired into north Israel on Sunday threatening civilians. *Hizbullah* has denied firing into Israel.

A five-nation Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) was set up in 1996 to monitor compliance with an "understanding" between the various parties involved. The terms of the "understanding" include prohibitions on attacks which lead to civilian deaths.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging all parties to take all measures to protect civilians and specifically to refrain from any indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks;

- reminding the Israeli government of the general prohibition contained in international humanitarian law against attacking hospitals and civilian sites indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

APPEALS TO:

Israel:

Binyamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, 3 Kaplan Street, Hakiryia, Jerusalem 91007, Israel

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Jerusalem, Israel

Faxes: + 972 3 691 7915

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Hizbullah:

Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah, P.O. Box 266-25, Beirut, Lebanon

Telegrams: Shaykh Nasrallah, Beirut, Lebanon

Faxes: +961 1 601 006 (ask to send a fax)

Salutation: Dear Shaykh Nasrallah

COPIES TO:

to diplomatic representatives of Israel and Lebanon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 April 1999.