

EXTERNAL

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Fear for Safety

20 August 1997

ISRAEL/LEBANON Civilians in parts of Lebanon and Israel

Ten civilians have been killed and dozens more wounded in what appear to be deliberate or indiscriminate attacks by Israeli and pro-Israeli militias on Lebanon, and by *Hizbullah* on Israel. Amnesty International fears that more civilians may be killed or wounded.

On 18 August 1997, a *Hizbullah* bomb and shelling killed three civilians, including a militia commander's two children, in Jezzine. In retaliation, a Jezzine-based militia allied to the South Lebanon Army (SLA, funded by Israel) shelled residential areas of Sidon, killing seven civilians and wounding 36 others. Israel condemned the attack. On 19 August, *Hizbullah* fired Katyusha rockets on Qiryat Shemona in Northern Israel, wounding one civilian and damaging property. On 20 August, Israeli planes bombed targets in south and east Lebanon, reportedly wounding four civilians, including two children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Israel occupies a strip of South Lebanon, styled as its "security zone", policed by the SLA. After similar escalating attacks by both sides in April 1996, Israel launched operation "Grapes of Wrath", during which more than 150 civilians were killed as a result of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks. The operation was ended by an "understanding" which prohibited attacks on civilians. Israel and *Hizbullah* committed themselves "to ensuring that under no circumstances will civilians be the target of attack". Israel agreed that its forces "will not fire any kind of weapon at civilians or civilian targets in Lebanon", and *Hizbullah* agreed "not [to] carry out attacks by Katyusha rockets or by any kind of weapon into Israel". A group was set up with the task of "monitoring the application of the understanding", including members from France, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the United States

International law prohibits attacks against civilians. Article 48 of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, relating to the victims of International Armed Conflicts, which reflects customary law, sets out the "Basic rule" regarding the protection of civilian lives, in particular the principle of "distinction" between the civilian population and combatants. This states that: "In order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives."

Article 51(6) of Protocol 1 states unequivocally that: "Attacks against the civilian population or civilians by way of reprisals are prohibited".

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

To the Israeli Government:

- urging the Israeli Government to ensure that, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, it takes all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians by observing the principle of distinction at all times, including by refraining from direct attacks on civilians and from indiscriminate attacks on military targets;

- reminding the Israeli Government that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never justified, even in response to attacks against civilians in Israel.

To the SLA:

- urging the SLA to ensure that, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, it takes all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians by observing the principle of distinction at all times, including by refraining from direct attacks on civilians and from indiscriminate attacks on military targets;

- reminding the SLA that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never justified, even in response to attacks against civilians in areas controlled by Israel and the SLA.

To Hizbullah:

- urging the *Hizbullah* to ensure that, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, it takes all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians by observing the principle of distinction at all times, including by refraining from direct attacks on civilians and from indiscriminate attacks on military targets;

- reminding the *Hizbullah* that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never justified, even in response to attacks against civilians in Lebanon.

APPEALS TO:

To Israel:

Benyamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Hakirya, Jerusalem 91007, Israel
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Faxes: + 972 3 691 7915
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

To the SLA

General Antoine Lahad
South Lebanon Army
Marjayun
South Lebanon
Via Israel
Telegrams: General Lahad, SLA, Marajun, Via Israel
Salutation: Dear General

To Hizbullah:

Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah
P.O.Box 266-25
Beirut,
Lebanon
Telegrams: Shaykh Nasrallah, Beirut, Lebanon
Salutation: Dear Shaykh Nasrallah

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of Israel/Lebanon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 October 1997.