Security Council must ask UN Secretary-General to initiate comprehensive independent inquiry in Lebanon and Israel

Amnesty International urges the Security Council to immediately request the Secretary-General to establish an authoritative team of experts to conduct a comprehensive, timely, independent and impartial inquiry into violations of international law in Lebanon and Israel. These violations have resulted in killing more than 800 Lebanese civilians and about 40 Israeli civilians, in large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure and in the displacement of more than half a million Lebanese and tens of thousands of Israelis.

The Secretary-General proposed a more comprehensive investigation in a letter to the Security Council responding to its request of 30 July 2006 that he report on the deaths of dozens of civilians, many of them children, in Qana, southern Lebanon. In his report, the Secretary-General stressed that the devastating impact on civilians on both sides of the conflict rose to the "level of seriousness" requiring a comprehensive investigation.

"The blatant and persistent disregard for fundamental principles of international humanitarian law by both parties to the conflict and the mounting toll of civilian deaths on both sides require an immediate and concrete Council response in the form of a demand for a comprehensive, independent inquiry." Amnesty International said. "The inquiry must establish the truth about what happened in Qana, investigate reports of numerous other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and be asked to propose effective measures to hold those responsible accountable in law."

Amnesty International believes that serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, are likely to have been committed by forces of Israel and Hizbollah in the course of the current conflict. Although the international inquiry would first focus on Qana, already the subject of the Security Council's attention, its mandate must be comprehensive and include investigating whether there is a pattern of violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Amnesty International calls on the Security Council to require all parties to the conflict to fully cooperate with the inquiry. The Security Council must also ensure that it will have all the necessary financial resources and technical facilities to carry out a comprehensive and effective investigation. It should report to the Security Council shortly on the Qana incident, and then report at a later date on whether there exists a pattern of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, in order to identify individuals responsible, hold them accountable and help ensure that the victims will receive full reparation. The report should be public and make recommendations aimed at ending current and preventing further violations.

The inquiry team should consist of independent experts, known for their impartiality and integrity. They should include experts with proven expertise in investigating compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, in military matters, as well as in forensics and ballistics.