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Israel / Lebanon: End immediately attacks against civilians

The Israeli and Lebanese governments, and Hizbullah, must take immediate steps to end the ongoing attacks against civilians and civilian objects. Such attacks are a blatant breach of international humanitarian law and amount to war crimes.

It is vital at this time of rapidly rising tension that all parties observe the requirements of international humanitarian law, and that other governments take all appropriate steps to insist that they do so.

“Israel must put an immediate end to attacks against civilians and against civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, which constitute collective punishment. Israel must also respect the principle of proportionality when targeting any military objectives or civilian objectives that may be used for military purposes,” said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East Programme.

“Hizbullah must stop launching attacks against Israeli civilians and it must treat humanely the two Israeli soldiers it captured on 12 July and grant them immediate access to the International Committee of the Red Cross,” said Malcolm Smart.

The organization also called on the Lebanese government to take concrete measures to ensure that Hizbullah complies with these obligations under international law.

Background

Some 40 Lebanese civilians have reportedly been killed in Israeli air strikes and artillery shelling against villages in South Lebanon since yesterday’s cross-border attack by Hizbullah’s armed wing, in which two Israeli soldiers were captured and eight others killed.

Among the Lebanese victims were a family of ten, including eight children, who were killed in Dweir village, near Nabatiyeh, and a family of seven, including a seven-month-old baby, who were killed in Baflay village near Tyre. More than 60 other civilians were injured in these or other attacks.

Israeli forces have also launched deliberate attacks against civilian objects throughout Lebanon, including Beirut international airport, 10 bridges and an electricity power station, as well as against Hizbullah targets, notably the offices of its al-Manar television station in Beirut and its relay station in Baalbek.

At the same time, Hizbullah has been launching Katyusha rockets into Northern Israel. An Israeli woman was killed and dozens of other civilians were injured when a Katyusha rocket hit a house in the town of Nahariya earlier today.

The Fourth Geneva Convention, prohibits "collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism ..." (Article 33). According to Article 147 of the Convention, "extensive destruction ... not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly," hostage-taking and "torture or inhuman treatment" are grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and constitute war crimes. All state parties to the Convention are required to search for and ensure the prosecution of perpetrators of grave breaches of the said Convention.

Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions codifies the principle of distinction, a customary rule of international humanitarian law: "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 operation only against military objectives." (Article 48). International Humanitarian Law strictly prohibits attacks against civilians and civilian objects. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) includes as war crimes: "Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities", and "Intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects" (Article 8 2 (b) (i) and (ii)).

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