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國際
特赦
組織

URGENT ACTION

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Fear for safety/ health concern

ISRAEL

Thousands of civilians in southern Lebanon

Thousands of civilians are trapped in villages in southern Lebanon, where they are at grave risk from frequent Israeli air strikes and shelling. They are cut off from the outside world, in increasingly difficult conditions, with no access to medical services, adequate food, electricity or fuel. Among them are elderly and disabled people, as well as women and children.

Soon after the conflict began on 12 July, Israeli bombardment of roads, bridges, telecommunication transmitters, electricity networks and fuel depots throughout southern Lebanon and in other parts of the country forced tens of thousand of villagers to leave their homes. However, as Israeli air strikes intensified, it soon became very difficult for the inhabitants of many villages to leave, and dozens of civilians, many of them children, were killed while trying to flee to the larger towns. Such attacks increased fears and discouraged many villagers from attempting to leave. Others, who were prepared to take the risk of travelling, could not do so due to fuel shortages caused by the military action.

The majority of the villagers fled their homes between 31 July and 1 August, when Israel announced a 48-hour suspension of air strikes. However, thousands of others who were unable to leave are now trapped in the area. They include elderly and disabled people physically unable to travel, those who lived in more isolated areas and did not know about the 48-hour air strike suspension, and those who could not find transport out of the villages.

Since the resumption of Israeli air strikes on 2 August it has not even been possible for relief and rescue workers to travel to many villages in southern Lebanon. Very few channels of communication are open, as without electricity people cannot charge their mobile telephones, unless their village has a generator and fuel to power it.

Prior to 2 August, the situation was already dire in several villages. On 31 July, journalists who entered the village of Bint Jbail found several people alive under the rubble of their homes after Israeli forces had attacked the area. The bodies of some of the dead were able to be recovered, but others could not be extricated from under the heavy debris and had to be left. Many more people are missing and feared dead under the collapsed houses or otherwise trapped in their homes.

On 1 August Amnesty International delegates visited the village of Ainata, where many of the houses have been destroyed by Israeli shelling, and tried to locate Zainab Khanafer, a 70-year-old woman whose son was seeking information about her whereabouts and condition. When they reached her house the delegates found that it had been destroyed, and were unable to establish if her body was under rubble. To date, her son has not been able to establish if she is dead or alive.

Many other families are in a similar situation. More than 200 people trapped in the villages of Aitaroun and Bint Jbail, including women, children, elderly and disabled people, are believed to be facing shortages of food and medicine. Amnesty International knows that at least one of those trapped is a pregnant woman. For at least a week, neither the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), nor any other humanitarian or relief organization, has been able to reach the villages under Israeli siege. On 7 August the ICRC stated that: "Fighting has prevented the ICRC from conducting most of its field operations outside the main cities in the last few days, depriving civilians trapped in villages in southern Lebanon of urgently needed assistance".

More information about Amnesty International's work on the current conflict between Israel and Hizbullah in Lebanon, including its calls on Hizbullah to stop the indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian areas and targets, can be found at: <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/lebanonisrael-documents-eng>

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Hebrew or your own language:

To the Israeli government:

- expressing concern for the safety and wellbeing of thousands of civilians trapped in villages in southern Lebanon, who have little or no access to medical services, adequate food, electricity or fuel;
- noting that those who are trapped include elderly and disabled people, women and children, and others who were unable to leave their homes when Israeli air strikes were suspended between 31 July and 1 August;
- calling on the authorities to put an immediate end to the deliberate, disproportionate and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, civilian infrastructure and properties in Lebanon;
- calling for the Israelis to allow safe passage in and out of the besieged villages for the civilian residents, and for humanitarian and relief workers.

To the Minister for Foreign Affairs in your national government:

- asking them to exercise their influence to urge the Israeli government to put an immediate end to the disproportionate use of force on civilian targets, and to ensure safe passage in and out of the besieged villages for the civilian residents, and humanitarian and relief workers.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant-General Dan Halutz
IDF Chief of General Staff
c/o Ministry of Defence
7 A' Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv, Israel
Fax: + 972 3 691 6940 / 3 608 0343
Email: info@mail.idf.il
Salutation: Dear Lieutenant-General

Amir Peretz
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv 61909, Israel
Fax: + 972 3 691 6940 / 3 696 2757 / 3 691 7915
Email: sar@mod.gov.il
pniot@mod.gov.il
aperetz@knesset.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Minister

Brigadier General Avihai Mandelblit
Judge Advocate General
6 David Elazar Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv, Israel
Fax: + 972 3 569 4370
Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.