

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 15/29/96

17 April 1996

Further information (1) on UA 100/96 (MDE 15/26/96, 12 April 1996) - Fear for Safety

LEBANON/ISRAEL Civilians in parts of Lebanon and Israel

Israeli attacks on Lebanon have escalated sharply since the Urgent Action of 12 April 1996. Calls by Israel or the South Lebanese Army (SLA), a militia allied to Israel, for the population to evacuate the area south of the Litani River or risk injury or death, have forced around 400,000 people to leave their homes in a 30-kilometre-wide strip of South Lebanon. By issuing the threat, the Israeli authorities appear to be asserting a right to fire indiscriminately at towns and villages in the area, showing little regard for the lives of civilians who cannot leave the area. Attacks on houses in south Lebanese villages have reportedly caused the deaths of up to 30 civilians and at least 166 injuries, some of which are critical. At the same time, *Hizbullah* rocket attacks on Northern Israel have continued, and up to 40 civilians have been reported injured.

For the seventh consecutive day Israeli helicopters and warplanes attacked the towns of Tyre and Sidon and a surrounding area covering at least 90 villages in South Lebanon. In addition the southern suburbs of Beirut were repeatedly attacked and the Palestinian refugee camp of 'Ayn al-Hilweh was also hit. Israeli army sources said the week-long bombardment of Southern Lebanon had so far involved 1,000 aircraft sorties and 1,000 shells. Other reports suggested that *Hizbullah* fired as many as 400 Katyusha rockets in 24 hours.

Since the escalation in fighting began on 11 April, only one *Hizbullah* member has been killed and four wounded and no Israeli soldiers have been reported killed, yet an attack by an Israeli helicopter on an ambulance at Hannieh in southern Lebanon on 13 April killed two women and four children.

Statements by senior Israeli military and political authorities continue to assert that they are taking care to avoid civilian casualties. But declarations such as that made on 11 April by Major General Amiram Levine, in command of Israeli forces in Lebanon, that "residents of South Lebanon who are under the authority of *Hizbullah* will be hit harder" shows a disregard for civilian life. The remark reportedly made by Prime Minister Shimon Peres that: "Unless the Lebanese Government will be in a position to take charge of the situation...the cost of the lack of order will be paid alas by the people of Lebanon" suggests that the Israeli Government is acting deliberately to create a humanitarian crisis.

Amnesty International believes that the mounting toll of civilian casualties, the clearly expressed intention to create what amounts to a "free fire zone" in Southern Lebanon with no regard for the fact that many civilians remain trapped within it, and attacks on what appear to be civilian targets in many areas, all point to the indiscriminate nature of the Israeli attack.

The International Committee of the Red Cross on 14 April issued a statement calling on parties to the conflict to cease attacks on civilians, or civilian property, indiscriminate attacks, attacks on medical facilities, transport or units, and acts or threats of violence whose primary purpose is to spread terror throughout the civilian population.

Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israel by *Hizbullah* have also escalated and are also being launched with apparent disregard for civilians. After the first attack on Beirut Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of *Hizbullah*, said: "Our response to the bombing of Beirut will not be in the north of Palestine. It will occur elsewhere, anywhere".

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or in your own language; indicate in your letters that Amnesty International is making appeals to both sides in the current conflict.

To the Israeli Government:

- expressing concern at the use of indiscriminate attacks on populated areas of southern Lebanon to force hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and reminding the Israeli Government that the laws governing armed conflict prohibit threats of violence which are intended to spread terror among the civilian population;
- urging that the Israeli Government, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, in any military action in Lebanon, it take all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians, such as refraining from direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks on military targets;
- reminding the Israeli Government that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never permissible, even as a measure of responding to such attacks against civilians in Israel.

To Hizbullah:

- expressing concern at reports of statements by the *Hizbullah* leadership that appear to indicate a disregard for the protection of civilian lives;
- urging that the *Hizbullah* leadership, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, in any military action in southern Lebanon or Israel, take all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians, such as refraining from direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks on military targets;
- reminding the *Hizbullah* leadership that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never permissible, even as a measure of responding to such attacks against civilians in Lebanon.

APPEALS TO:

ISRAEL:

Shimon Peres

Prime Minister and Minister of Defence

Office of the Prime Minister

3 Kaplan Street, Jerusalem 91007, Israel

Telegrams: Prime Minister Peres, Jerusalem, Israel

Telexes: 25279 MPRES IL

Faxes: +972 2 664 838; +972 2 6513 950

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Lieutenant-General Amnon Shahak

Chief of General Staff

c/o Ministry of Defence

7 'A' Street, Hakirya, Tel Aviv, Israel

Faxes: +972 3 691 6940

Telegrams: Chief of Staff Shahak, Tel Aviv, Israel

Salutation: Dear Lieutenant-General

HIZBULLAH:

Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah

P.O.Box 266-25

Beirut, Lebanon

Faxes: +961 1 601 006 (say "fax please")

Salutation: Dear Shaykh Nasrallah

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 May 1996.