

ISRAEL/LEBANON Killing and wounding of civilians in Lebanon and Israel

At least 10 people, including civilians, have been killed, and dozens wounded, across Lebanon and northern Israel over the last 24 hours as hostilities have escalated between Israel and armed groups opposed to the Israeli occupation of a "security zone" in south Lebanon. Eight of those killed in Israeli air raids were Lebanese, including civil defence workers and civilians. Two Israeli civilians died in *Hizbullah* shelling of the town of Qiryat Shemona in northern Israel. Amnesty International is concerned the this escalation may continue and result in more civilian casualties.

These attacks appear to constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law governing armed conflict, which prohibits attacks on civilians and non-military targets. Among the targets of Israeli air raids were a power station and a telecommunications relay station south of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. *Hizbullah* (Party of God) fired Katyusha rockets in indiscriminate shelling of residential areas in northern Israel. General Dan Halutz of Israeli military intelligence told a news conference that "The response, unlike our responses of the last three years, was a response against infrastructure targets and directed against all elements of force acting in Lebanon, and not just against *Hizbullah*, out of a clear intention to deliver a message that there are no elements immune from an Israeli army response if the wild attacks of the *Hizbullah* go on." Meanwhile Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of *Hizbullah* has stated that "The use of air raids to strike civilian infrastructure and sow terror will not protect the settlements in northern Palestine [Israel]."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Israel occupies a strip of South Lebanon, which it calls its "security zone", policed by its proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). After a similar escalation of attacks by both sides in April 1996, Israel launched operation "Grapes of Wrath", during which more than 150 Lebanese civilians were killed as a result of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks. The operation was ended by an "understanding" which prohibited attacks on civilians, signed in April 1996. Israel and *Hizbullah* (the main militia engaged in fighting Israel and the SLA) 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", with 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 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 Israel.

To Hizbullah:

- urging *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 *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

PO 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 6 August 1999.