

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### Lebanon: Grinding impact of maritime blockade on civilians

Amnesty International hopes that Israel's lifting of its air blockade of Lebanon yesterday will lead to an improvement in the human rights situation as Lebanon struggles to recover from the devastating effects of the war. However, the organisation is concerned that the civilian population of Lebanon continues to be affected by Israel's ongoing maritime blockade.

The blockade, which Israel states is aimed at preventing the re-arming of Hizbullah and the transport out of Lebanon of two captured Israeli soldiers, has continued to hamper reconstruction and recovery efforts. Thousands of shipping containers have had to be re-directed to other ports in the eastern Mediterranean, or remain at sea, drastically increasing transport costs and delaying the economic and social recovery of the country. Economic activity was already severely impacted by the war and Israeli bombings, much of which targeted civilian infrastructure including a number of large businesses, and certain sectors are completely devastated. Amnesty International delegates have met with a range of individuals in Lebanon including representatives of the fishing, construction, agricultural and medical sectors which remain affected by the sea blockade.

While blockades are not prohibited per se by international humanitarian law, they must never prevent foodstuffs and other essential supplies from reaching the civilian population. The manner in which they are imposed should also minimize the adverse impact on the civilian population. Israel's maritime blockade has meant that sufficient medical supplies and other vital equipment and goods have not been able to reach Lebanon.

Among more vulnerable sectors of the civilian population who have suffered most through more than eight weeks of blockade are the country's fishermen. Unable to fish since the start of the conflict the boats of some 8,000 fishermen remain idle and many of the men and their families have become destitute. In addition, in an Israeli air-force attack of early August that was a possible war crime, the fishermen's port at al-Waza'i near Beirut was destroyed including 400 fishing boats and various workshops and offices. Even when the lifting of the maritime blockade occurs, the fishermen and their families will continue to be affected by the huge oil spill caused by the Israeli bombing in mid-July of the coastal Jiyye power station. The slick from some 10-15,000 tons of fuel oil presents a long-term threat to marine life of the region and to the people whose livelihoods depend on it.

Amnesty International reiterates its call for the immediate establishment of a comprehensive, independent and impartial inquiry into violations of international humanitarian law by both Israel and Hizbullah in the conflict. The inquiry should examine in particular the impact of this conflict on the civilian population. It should propose effective measures to hold accountable those responsible for crimes under international law, and to ensure that the victims receive full reparation.

