

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

12 April 1996

LEBANON / ISRAEL

Civilians in parts of Lebanon and Israel

Amnesty International fears that many more civilians may be killed in bomb and rocket attacks as a result of escalating attacks by Israel on Lebanon and by *Hizbullah* (party of God, an armed Islamist group based in Lebanon) on Israel.

At least eight civilians have already been killed and over 35 injured in an exchange of attacks over the last four days.

On 12 April further Katyusha rockets were fired by *Hizbullah* at towns in Israel with apparent disregard for the safety of civilians. On the morning of 12 April Israel scattered leaflets and used a radio run by the South Lebanese Army, a Christian militia allied to Israel, to warn civilians of 40 towns and villages in south Lebanon to flee by 2.30pm Lebanese time. A mass exodus is taking place from the threatened areas. It is unclear the extent to which the Israeli warning seemed genuinely aimed at avoiding civilian casualties, or was rather intended to terrorize the civilian population into fleeing.

Statements made by both Israeli and *Hizbullah* leaders increase the fear of more civilian deaths. On 11 April, after an Israeli helicopter attack on several targets (including an alleged helicopter base in south Beirut) which caused at least four deaths, at least three of them civilians, Major General Amiram Levine, in command of Israeli forces in Lebanon, is reported to have said that "Residents in south Lebanon who are under the authority of *Hizbullah* will be hit harder". General Amnon Shahak, Israeli Chief of General Staff said that: "We will not hesitate to attack *Hizbullah* targets even if they are in the middle of the civilian population, which we would like to spare". Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of *Hizbullah*, said, after the attack on Beirut: "Our response to the bombing of Beirut will not be in the north of Palestine. It will occur elsewhere, anywhere". *Hizbullah* attacks using Katyusha rockets on towns in northern Israel have already wounded many civilians.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hizbullah attacks on Israel, which occupies a strip about 15 kilometres wide of south Lebanon as a "security zone", have increased over the past months. In addition to attacks on Israeli soldiers in the zone they have also launched attacks using Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, particularly against Qiryat Shemona, an Israeli settlement near the Lebanese border. Israel has replied by bombing alleged *Hizbullah* positions, usually in Lebanese villages. During March, south Lebanese villages were frequently shelled by Israel, causing the deaths of two civilians, apparently in reprisal for *Hizbullah* rocket raids into northern Israel and attacks on Israeli forces which killed six soldiers.

The recent escalation followed the death of a 14-year-old Lebanese boy in Brashit village as a result of a bomb explosion. Israel denied placing the bomb. The following day *Hizbullah* fired rockets against Qiryat Shemona wounding 36 people.

The Israeli Government spokesman, Uri Dromi, said: It was a minimal possible action yesterday [11 April], we went out of our way not to hit civilians. What we have shown yesterday was only the tip of the iceberg of what we can do. However, in these "targeted" attacks at least three civilians were killed. The civilians reportedly included a 60-year-old man killed in Beirut and a 27-year-old woman killed in her car which had stopped at a sandwich stall north of Sidon.

As the conflict escalates Amnesty International is concerned that future attacks will lead to many civilian casualties and calls on both sides to refrain from direct attacks on civilians or any indiscriminate attacks.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

Be sure to indicate in your letters that AI is making similar appeals to both sides to the current conflict.

To the Israeli Government:

- expressing concern at reports of statements by senior Israeli civil and military officials and politicians that appear to indicate a disregard for the protection of civilian lives in parts of Lebanon which might be the subject of attack by Israeli armed forces;
- urging the Israeli Government to ensure, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, that in any military action in Lebanon it takes all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians, 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 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 in Israel;
- urging the *Hizbullah* leadership to ensure, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, that in any military action in southern Lebanon or Israel it takes all necessary steps to ensure the safety of civilians, including by refraining from direct attacks on civilians and from 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: 1) 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

2) Hizbullah

Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah

P.O.Box 266-25

Beirut, Lebanon

Faxes: +961 1 601 006 (say Fax please)

Salutation: Dear Shaykh Nasrallah

COPIES OF APPEALS TO ISRAELI AUTHORITIES ONLY: 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 30 May 1996.