

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 15/96/97

27 November 1997

Further information on UA 280/97 (MDE 15/50/97, 20 August 1997) - Fear for Safety

ISRAEL/SOUTH LEBANON Civilians in South Lebanon

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On 23 November 1997 at least seven Lebanese civilians were killed and others wounded when mortar shells were fired at the small village of Beit Lif in South Lebanon. Those killed including Hana' Hussein Zalqut, a four-year-old girl and Sa'id Abdallah Hamud, an 80-year-old man. So far no group has claimed responsibility for what appears to be an indiscriminate attack on civilians. Amnesty International fears that more civilians may be killed or wounded.

Israel occupies a strip of South Lebanon, styled as its "security zone", policed by the South Lebanon Army (SLA), funded and supported by Israel. Other armed groups active in the "security zone" include *Hizbullah* and the *Amal* movement, both Shi'a based armed groups engaged in fighting Israel and the SLA. None of these groups has claimed responsibility for the deadly attack, and the international committee monitoring activity in the zone did not identify the party behind the shelling. Amnesty International calls on all groups to avoid putting civilians at risk.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Israel launched operation "Grapes of Wrath" in April 1996, during which more than 150 civilians were killed as a result of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks. The operation was ended by an "understanding" which prohibited attacks on civilians. Israel and *Hizbullah* committed themselves "to ensuring that under no circumstances will civilians be the target of attack". A group was set up with the task of "monitoring the application of the understanding", including 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, relating to the victims of International Armed Conflicts, which reflects customary law, 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".

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic, French or in your own language, to all groups involved, in equal numbers:**

- deploring the attack on the village of Beit Lif in which at least seven Lebanese civilians were killed and others wounded;
- urging all groups to ensure that, in accordance with international law governing armed conflict, they take 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 them that under international law attacks against the civilian population are never justified;

- noting that you are expressing these concerns to all the groups involved in the conflict in the "security zone".

**APPEALS 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**

**The South Lebanon Army:**

General Antoine Lahad  
South Lebanon Army  
Marjayun  
South Lebanon  
Via Israel

**Telegrams: General Lahad, SLA, Marajun, Via Israel**

**Salutation: Dear General**

**Hizbullah:**

Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah  
P.O. Box 266-25  
Beirut  
Lebanon

**Telegrams: Shaykh Nasrallah, Beirut, Lebanon**

**Salutation: Dear Shaykh Nasrallah**

**Amal:**

Nabih Barri  
Speaker of the National Assembly  
National Assembly  
Beirut  
Lebanon

**Faxes: +961 1 345 270**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Barri**

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

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 January 1998.