

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 18/003/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 095
23 May 2007

Lebanon: Concerns on fighting between army and Fatah al-Islam group

Amnesty International is greatly concerned about the death of civilians as a result of the fighting in the Nahr al-Bared camp between heavily armed fighters of Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the army's use of artillery and other heavy weapons, including tank fire, against heavily-populated areas. Whatever the weapons used and the tactics adopted, including during any attempt that may yet be made to take control of the camp by force, the Lebanese army must use proportionate force and take the necessary precautions at all times to protect and ensure the safety of civilians.

Fatah al-Islam has an obligation to ensure that civilians are not unnecessarily exposed to the fighting and are allowed to leave the camp if they so wish. Civilians wishing to leave must be evacuated and their movement should be facilitated and protected.

Humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross and the United Nations must be allowed immediate and unhindered access inside the camp, where civilians face growing problems also because of cuts in water and electricity supply.

Countries that exercise influence on the Lebanese government must ensure that any weapons delivered to the Lebanese army do not contribute to human rights abuses.

There is a real fear that the clashes could spread to other Palestinian refugee camps or could develop into wider political violence in Lebanon, again raising fears of a return to the intercommunal violence that marked the 1970s and 1980s. Whatever the immediate cause of these incidents, they highlight the long-standing international failure to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a permanent cause of fear and polarization around the world as shown in the Amnesty International Report 2007 published today.

"It took the United Nations Security Council four weeks to call for a cease-fire in Lebanon during the conflict in 2006 - the UN must act more urgently this time," said Secretary General Irene Khan. "What is urgently needed is principled and sustained engagement by the UN and world leaders to deal with the situation in Lebanon and the broader Middle East."

Background

At least 70 people have so far been killed in the fighting which erupted four days ago between Fatah al-Islam, an Islamic militant group, and the Lebanese army. The fighting started in Tripoli, north Lebanon, then escalated at Nahr al-Bared camp which is home to around 30,000 Palestinian refugees. There are reports of the army's use of heavy weaponry, including tanks. The casualties included at least 13 civilians - the real figure is likely to be higher - in addition to

some 30 Lebanese army soldiers and 25 fighters. Thousands of refugees were finally able to leave the camp last night during a lull in the fighting and many continue to leave.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>