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Lebanon/Israel conflict: attacks on civilians need immediate investigation

Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks have killed civilians on both sides - some 1,000 civilians in Lebanon and some 40 in Israel. Call for an immediate inquiry into violations of international law by both sides of the conflict, including violations which may amount to war crimes.

The recent ceasefire between Israel and Hizbullah ended almost five weeks of fighting.

Bloodshed and destruction in the violent conflict was mainly caused by indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians on both sides. Some 1,000 civilians are reported to have been killed in Israeli air strikes and heavy artillery shelling in Lebanon, and some 40 civilians by Hizbullah rocket attacks in northern Israel.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, hundreds of civilians were killed by Israeli forces in attacks on residential areas causing massive destruction. Others were killed in attacks on vehicles as villagers were heeding the calls by the Israeli army to leave their homes in South Lebanon.

On 7 August, more than 50 civilians were killed in one of Beirut's neighbourhoods, Shyah. Amnesty International (AI) delegates in the country visited the area the day after Israeli bombardment and found a scene of utter devastation, with bodies of women and children still being pulled from beneath the rubble. Israeli forces had not issued any prior warning to the inhabitants of the impending air strikes. Shyah, had been considered safer than other districts and people who had fled their homes from other parts of the country, had sought shelter there.

As more areas were targeted by Israeli forces the number of displaced people grew: a month into the conflict about one million people – a quarter of the entire population of Lebanon – had fled. Since the ceasefire, many are returning home, but tens of thousands have no home to return to.

Israel

In Israel, some 40 civilians were killed in attacks by Hizbullah on towns and villages, including Haifa, Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya, Safed, Ma'alot and Acre. Hizbullah launched thousands of rockets into northern Israel, many of them in areas populated by civilians. AI delegates who visited the north of Israel to investigate the attacks found evidence that some of the rockets used by Hizbullah contained thousands of metal ball bearings. These increase the potential for fatalities as people not in immediate vicinity can be killed or seriously injured by the spray of ball bearings.

Act quickly:

Call for an immediate investigation into violations of international law by Israeli and Hizbullah, including violations which may amount to war crimes.

By emailing member states of the UN Security Council, request that the UN Secretary-General establishes a comprehensive, independent and impartial investigation.

Dear Ministers,

I am gravely concerned that the current ceasefire agreement includes no reference to the necessity to uphold requirements under international law, including the need to establish accountability for violations by both sides of the conflict.

Therefore, I call on your government to exert your influence on the UN Security Council to request the UN Secretary-General to establish immediately an authoritative team of experts to conduct a comprehensive, independent and impartial investigation into violations of international law in Lebanon and Israel, including violations which may amount to war crimes.

Press for this inquiry to have all the necessary financial and technical resources to enable it to carry out an effective investigation. The outcome of the inquiry must be made public. It must include recommendations aimed at ending and preventing further violations, and its finding made public.

Anyone against whom there is evidence of war crimes must be brought to justice in proceedings which meet international standards for fair trial.

Yours sincerely,

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Some Foreign Ministers can be contacted by fax. Please print out your appeal text and send it to each fax number.

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Create an email with your appeal text to the Foreign Ministers and send it to all email addresses listed above (either in one email or in individual emails).



At least 23 agricultural workers were killed in an Israeli air strike on 4 August on a farm in the village of al-Qaa, North of Baalbak.

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