

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Lebanon: Need for responsible leadership and comprehensive approach to end impunity**

(Beirut) As thousands of people have been taking part in the latest demonstrations on the streets of Beirut, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan called on political leaders to ensure that the demonstrations do not escalate into political violence leading to human rights abuses.

"From a human rights perspective, this is a remarkable display of people exercising their freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in a largely peaceful manner," said Ms Khan.

However, with news of at least one violent death yesterday, Ms Khan warned: "Lebanon has an unfortunate history of political conflict along sectarian lines that led to massive human rights violations in the past, which remain largely unaddressed. All political actors must act responsibly to avoid a repeat of the mistakes of the past."

In meetings with President Lahoud, Prime Minister Siniora and Speaker Berri, Ms Khan urged: "All political leaders must use their influence to ensure that the demonstrations do not escalate into political violence leading to human rights abuses."

Ms Khan is in Beirut as part of a visit to the Middle East. Yesterday she visited southern Lebanon to see first-hand the effect of the recent war on civilians.

"The human toll and destruction of infrastructure during the war were massive. The current political developments in Beirut should not divert attention from the reconstruction efforts – people still need urgent and sustainable help to deal with the aftermath of the war," said Ms Khan.

"The political demonstrations cannot detract from the need to address impunity. The lack of effective mechanisms to deal with impunity has bred a high level of mistrust in Lebanon, part of which is being voiced now in the demonstrations."

Amnesty International stated that the Lebanese system had failed to deliver justice for past cases of political killings and other human rights abuses.

"There is a need for a comprehensive strategy with concrete measures which will provide justice for all," said Ms Khan.

Referring to the proposed tribunal to try those found guilty of involvement in the assassination of former

Prime Minister Hariri, Amnesty International cautioned that a tribunal with an international component could be of greater value if it is part of such a comprehensive strategy.

“The current political divisions show that there is mistrust and suspicion, which will be deepened if a selective approach to justice is taken,” said Ms Khan.

“A comprehensive strategy requires reform of the Lebanese justice system and commitment to international human rights treaties.”

Amnesty International is calling for a comprehensive approach to accountability in Lebanon. Such an approach should include:

- The establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to look into human rights abuses committed by both sides during the most recent war;
- Reform of the national justice system – which should include the abolition of military courts for civilian crimes, of the Justice Council, and of the use of evidence obtained by torture;
- Repeal of the amnesty laws so that past abuses can be investigated and prosecuted;
- Ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

**Notes to editors:**

**For further information or to arrange an interview with Irene Khan**, please call Nicole Choueiry on mobile + 44 7831 640 170 or +961 701 57 589.

After visiting Lebanon, Irene Khan will lead a delegation to Israel and the Occupied Territories (including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) between 6 and 11 December.

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[http://blogs.amnesty.org/blogs/israelot\\_dec06?open&day1](http://blogs.amnesty.org/blogs/israelot_dec06?open&day1)

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