

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 02/012/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 211
11 August 2006

Lebanon/Israel: The United Nations Human Rights Council must make a positive contribution to ending violations of human rights and humanitarian law

Amnesty International has contributed the following written statement to the second special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which is scheduled to open in Geneva on Friday, 11 August 2006.

"The Members of the Human Rights Council have a duty to address the current human rights and humanitarian crisis in Lebanon and Israel on the basis of the principles of impartiality, objectivity, constructive dialogue and cooperation. Only by applying those principles faithfully, can the Members enable the Council to contribute to ending current violations of human rights and humanitarian law and preventing future ones. The Council must deliver a clear message that holds real promise of results, not adopt a resolution of no effect. Civilians in both Lebanon and Israel are suffering from serious and widespread abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law. Amnesty International encourages governments to rise above the temptations of political advantage to enable this Council to make a contribution to ending the suffering in Lebanon and Israel.

Amnesty International has teams on the ground in Lebanon and Israel and has formed the following assessments as of 10 August 2006.

Lebanon

In Lebanon some 800 civilians, including hundreds of women and children, have been killed and thousands injured by Israeli forces, most notably by air strikes and heavy artillery shelling. The Israeli Defence Forces have also routinely targeted and destroyed civilian objects such as roads, bridges, residential buildings, telecommunication transmitters, electricity networks and fuel depot in Lebanon. Medical facilities have also been targeted. The resulting killing of many civilians and large scale property destruction and the repeated threats against the civilian population in South Lebanon have forced more than 900, 000 civilians -- a quarter of the entire population of Lebanon -- to flee their homes and become internally displaced or seek refuge in other countries. Thousands of others remain trapped in villages in South Lebanon, cut off from the outside world and with no access to medical services, adequate food, electricity and fuel, and other essential services. The blockade by Israel on Lebanese airspace and territorial waters has caused shortages of fuel, medicines and other essential goods. Daily bombardments of residential areas, roads and other infrastructure continue to hamper the distribution of urgently needed humanitarian assistance.

Israel's claim that attacks by its forces are directed exclusively against legitimate targets is not borne out by the evidence gathered by Amnesty International's field research in Lebanon. The organisation's on-site investigations reveal that in the conduct of their military operations, Israeli forces have routinely violated both the principle of distinction between civilians and military targets and the principle of proportionality, in disregard of international humanitarian law. They have also unlawfully targeted civilian objects. *Prima facie* these violations amount to war crimes.

Israel

Civilians in Northern Israel have been subjected to continuous rocket attacks from Hizbullah who have fired an average of one hundred (100) rockets each day into the area, hitting the city of Haifa and towns of Nahariya, Acre, Carmiel, Kiryat Shmona, and others. There is solid evidence that many of these attacks have been deliberately targeted at civilian buildings and residential areas. According to the information gathered by Amnesty International's delegates, some of the rockets carried warheads containing hard metal ball bearings, which have no apparent purpose other than to inflict death and severe injury to persons in the vicinity of the strike. At least 39 civilians in Israel have been killed and several hundred injured in these attacks. The daily barrage of rockets has affected virtually every aspect of civilian life in the northern areas of Israel, including access to medical care, food and shelter. Tens of thousands of residents have already fled from the north and most of those who are left are forced to spend much of their time in shelters.

This deliberate targeting of rockets on civilian areas constitutes a direct attack on the civilian population that is unlawful and amounts to a *prima facie* war crime.

Call for an investigation into violations of international law

Amnesty International calls on the Human Rights Council to condemn the abuse of international human rights law and humanitarian law by all parties to the current hostilities in Lebanon and Israel.

The organisation calls on the Council to demand that all parties to the hostilities respect their obligations under international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The organisation calls on the Council to encourage all UN member states to take effective steps to ensure that all parties to the hostilities respect international law.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan made clear to the Security Council on 7 August that in light of indications of a pattern of violations international law, a more comprehensive investigation into the conflict's effect on civilians is needed.

Amnesty International calls on the Human Rights Council to request that the UN Secretary-General establish a comprehensive, timely, independent, impartial and expert investigation into violations of international law by all parties to the current hostilities in Lebanon and Israel. The inquiry should be mandated to investigate all credible reports of violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law, to propose effective measures to hold those responsible accountable in law, and to help ensure that the victims will receive full remedy and reparation. The investigative team should include all necessary expertise and be given the necessary financial resources and technical facilities to carry out a comprehensive and effective investigation. The report of the investigation should be delivered by the Secretary-General to the Human Rights Council. The report should be public and should make recommendations aimed at ending current abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law and preventing future ones."

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>