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Lebanon: Amnesty International condemns murder of parliamentarian and other civilians

Amnesty International condemns the murder on 13 June 2007 of Lebanese parliamentarian Walid Eido, and nine other people, as a result of a car bomb attack in the al-Manara area of Beirut. Walid Eido was killed together with his elder son and two bodyguards who were travelling with him. Six other people who were in the vicinity when the car bomb was detonated were also killed and at least 11 were reported injured.

Amnesty International condemns deliberate attacks on civilians and calls for all such attacks to be investigated, promptly and thoroughly, and for those responsible to be brought to justice in accordance with international standards.

The attack which killed Walid Eido was the latest in a series of attacks on Lebanese politicians and journalists considered to be strong critics of the Syrian government. It also follows a spate of other bomb explosions in and around Beirut in recent weeks that appear calculated to cause political instability, in which a number of civilians have been killed and injured. These have been blamed on the Syrian government and its intelligence agents by Lebanese government authorities, but little evidence has been produced as yet to substantiate this. For its part, the Syrian government has denied any involvement in attack which killed Walid Eido and others. At least 12 people have been killed and scores have been injured as a result of explosions in Beirut since 20 May 2007.

As a member of parliament representing the Future Movement led by Saad al-Hariri, Walid Eido, 65, was a strong critic of the Syrian government. He was one of the principal leaders of the mass demonstrations that were held in Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, also in a car bomb explosion, on 14 February 2005. That explosion killed 22 people in addition to the former prime minister. It led to mass protests resulting in the withdrawal of Syrian military forces, who had exercised strong influence in Lebanon for the previous 30 years, in April 2005. It resulted also in a UN-sponsored international investigation, the arrest of several senior Lebanese security officials, and the establishment of a joint Lebanese-international criminal tribunal to try those accused in connection with the assassination of Rafik al-Hariri and other similar attacks. This joint Lebanese-international tribunal is now being established in pursuance of a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council on 30 May 2007. Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has reportedly requested that the UN-sponsored investigation into the assassination of Rafik al-Hariri should also now investigate the assassination of Walid Eido.

The assassination of Walid Eido comes at a time of mounting tension in Lebanon. As well as the series of bomb explosions in and around Beirut, since 20 May the Lebanese army has been engaged in a continuing battle with members of Fatah al-Islam, an Islamist armed group, at the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli. At least 130 people have been killed as a result of the fighting at Nahr al-Bared, including at least 27 civilians, and more than 20,000 Palestinian refugees have been forcibly displaced from the camp and are now sheltering at al-Beddawi, another Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli, and elsewhere. Several thousand civilians, however, are reported to remain in the camp and to be in peril due to the fighting and lack of water, electricity and food.

In the months following the February 2005 killing of Rafik al-Hariri, several other Lebanese politicians and journalists known to be strong critics of the Syrian government, and of any continuing Syrian military or political presence in Lebanon, were killed or injured as a result of assassination attempts. They included Samir Kassir, a prominent journalist, who was killed by a car bomb in June 2005; Gibran Tuani, another leading journalist and parliamentarian who was killed by a car bomb in December 2005; and Pierre Gemayel, Lebanon's Industry Minister, who was assassinated by unknown gunmen in November 2006.

