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# LEBANON

## LEBANESE REPUBLIC

Head of state: Emile Lahoud  
 Head of government: Fouad Siniora  
 Death penalty: retentionist  
 International Criminal Court: not ratified

In a 34-day war in July-August between Hizbullah and Israel, about 1,200 Lebanese people were killed, hundreds of them children, and around one million were displaced by Israeli attacks. The attacks also destroyed tens of thousands of homes and much civilian infrastructure in Lebanon. At least 20 people were killed and scores injured by Israeli cluster munitions that remained after the conflict. Hizbullah launched missiles into Israel, causing the deaths of 43 civilians and damaging hundreds of buildings. The UN inquiry into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri continued. Palestinian refugees resident in Lebanon continued to face restrictions, including on access to housing and work, and rights at work. The law continued to discriminate against women and failed to afford them adequate protection against violence.

## Background

On 12 July, Hizbullah's military wing (Islamic Resistance) attacked an Israeli patrol inside Israel, killing three Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. A major military confrontation ensued between Israeli and Hizbullah forces. The Lebanese government said that it had no advance warning of the attack by Hizbullah that triggered the conflict, did not condone it and sought a ceasefire from the outset.

Hostilities ended on 14 August, following UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which imposed a ceasefire and enlarged the role of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). On 17 August the Lebanese army moved into south Lebanon.

Internal tensions sharpened after the conflict. In November, six government ministers, including all five representatives of the Shi'a community, resigned from the cabinet provoking a political crisis. On 21 November, Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel of the Kataeb (Phalange) Party was killed by unknown assassins. The UN Security Council agreed to a request from Prime Minister Fouad Siniora that the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) would include the killing among the attacks committed since October 2004 in relation to which it was providing technical assistance to aid the investigations being carried out by the Lebanese authorities. Throughout December, thousands of supporters of Hizbullah, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and allied political parties mounted continuous mass and largely peaceful protests in Beirut calling for a greater role in government.

### Hizbullah-Israel war

By the time of the ceasefire on 14 August, Israeli attacks had killed 1,191 people in Lebanon and injured more than 4,400, the overwhelming majority of them civilians. One-third of the civilians killed were children. Some 40 Lebanese soldiers were killed in Israeli strikes, even though the Lebanese army did not participate in the fighting.

Around a million people, a quarter of the country's population, were displaced during the conflict, of whom some 200,000 had not been able to return to their homes by the end of the year.

Much of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, including tens of thousands of homes, Beirut airport, seaports, major roads, bridges, schools, supermarkets, petrol stations and factories. About 50 schools were destroyed and up to 300 damaged by Israeli bombardments. Many of Lebanon's fishermen, factory workers and agricultural workers lost their livelihoods. A large oil spill caused by Israel's bombing in mid-July of the coastal Jiyeh power station presented a long-term threat to the marine life of the region.

Up to one million unexploded cluster bomblets remained in south Lebanon after the conflict, posing a continuing risk to civilians. Some 200 people, including tens of children, had been killed and injured by these bomblets and newly laid mines by the end of the year. The task of clearing unexploded ordnance was made more difficult by the Israeli authorities' failure to provide maps of the exact areas targeted by their forces when using cluster bombs.

- Six-year-old 'Abbas Yusef Shibli was playing with three friends near his home in Blida village on 26 August when one of the children tried to pick up what to him looked like a perfume bottle. It exploded, rupturing his colon and gall bladder, and perforating his lung. His three friends were also injured.

Hizbullah fighters reportedly fired nearly 4,000 rockets, some of them armed with ball-bearings, into northern Israel, including into populated areas. The rockets could not be targeted sufficiently accurately to distinguish between military and civilian targets. The rockets caused the deaths of 43 civilians, forced thousands of civilians in northern Israel to be displaced from their homes or to spend long periods in bomb shelters, and damaged buildings. There were also clashes across south Lebanon between Israeli troops and Hizbullah combatants.

Hizbullah did not disclose the fate or condition of the two Israeli soldiers it had captured, while at least six Lebanese nationals, most of them known or suspected Hizbullah fighters, remained detained in Israeli prisons at the end of the year. Indirect negotiations for a prisoner exchange were reportedly ongoing between the two sides. Israel suspended access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the prisoners it held after Hizbullah refused to grant such access to the two Israeli soldiers.

Both Hizbullah and Israel committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. Hizbullah's rocket attacks on northern Israel amounted to deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, as well as indiscriminate attacks. Its attacks also violated other rules of international humanitarian law, including the prohibition on reprisal attacks on the civilian population.

## Rafiq al-Hariri investigation

In September, the UNIIIC submitted its fifth interim report on its investigation into the killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and 22 others in 2005. On 13 November the Cabinet approved a UN draft for an international tribunal to try those suspected of involvement in the killings, but it was unclear whether the absence of the six ministers who resigned invalidated the vote. The decision also required ratification by Parliament and the President.

## Enforced disappearances

Despite campaigning by families and non-governmental organizations, the fate of thousands of Lebanese and other nationals who became victims of enforced disappearance between 1975 and 1990 remained unknown.

The identities were confirmed of 15 Lebanese soldiers, whose bodies were among 20 exhumed in Beirut in November 2005. In May, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Gea'gea' said that four Iranians who were kidnapped by his militia in 1982 were killed soon after their seizure. The State Prosecutor stated in June that some 44 bodies exhumed in 'Anjar in December 2005 dated from before the 1950s. The body of French national Michel Seurat who was kidnapped in 1985 was returned to his family in March after reportedly being found during construction work.

## Political arrests

On 5 February, there were violent protests at the Danish Embassy in Beirut against the publication in a Danish newspaper of cartoons that offended many Muslims. The Embassy was set alight and at least one person died in the violence. More than 400 people were arrested, including 42 Syrian nationals who were reportedly not present at the protests. The 42 were detained in Barbar Khazen prison in west Beirut, under the control of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). They were held there for five days and denied access to legal counsel. At least two were beaten by ISF interrogators in an apparent attempt to force "confessions" about their involvement in the protests. On 10 February, they were taken before the military court in Beirut, which ordered their release.

On 11-12 February, more than 200 other people arrested in connection with the 5 February protests were reportedly

brought before the same court, whose procedures fall short of international standards for fair trials. The outcome of the hearings was not made public.

## Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment in custody continued to be reported.

- Thirteen people arrested between 30 December 2005 and 4 January 2006 on security charges were reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated while detained at the Information Branch of the Internal Security Department and in a special section of Rumieh prison. Alleged methods included beatings with sticks and metal bars, sleep deprivation and threats of death and rape. A number of the men reportedly "confessed" as a result of torture and duress. Three of the men were released in September.

The authorities continued to refuse to allow the ICRC unfettered access to all prisons, especially those operated by the Ministry of Defence where civilians are held. This was despite a presidential decree in 2002 granting the ICRC such access.

Human rights groups criticized a memorandum of understanding signed in late 2005 by the UK and Lebanon in which the Lebanese authorities provided assurances that terrorism suspects returned to Lebanon from the UK would not be treated inhumanely or tortured. The groups argued that such memorandums undermine the absolute prohibition of torture.

## Palestinian refugees

Several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon continued to face wide-ranging restrictions on access to housing, work and rights at work. A law regulating property ownership bans Palestinian refugees from owning property, and the Lebanese authorities prohibit the expansion or renovation of refugee camps.

In June, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child criticized persistent discrimination faced by Palestinian children in Lebanon. The Committee expressed concern about the harsh social and economic living conditions of Palestinian refugee children in refugee camps and their limited access to public services, including social and health services and education.

## Discrimination and violence against women

Women continued to face widespread discrimination in public and private life. Neither the legal system nor the policies and practices of the state provided adequate protection from violence in the family. Discriminatory practices were permitted under personal status laws, nationality laws, and laws in the Penal Code relating to violence in the family.

## Human rights defenders

In general, human rights groups operated freely but some human rights defenders were harassed by the authorities.

- Muhamad Mugraby, a lawyer and human rights defender, was tried on charges of "slander of the military establishment" for criticizing Lebanon's military court system to members of the European Parliament in 2003. In April, the Military Court of Cassation dropped the charges and ruled that the Permanent Military Court, which had convicted him, did not have jurisdiction in such a case.

## AI country reports /visits

### Reports

- Lebanon: Limitations on Rights of Palestinian Refugee Children, Briefing to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (AI Index: MDE 18/004/2006)
- Israel/Lebanon: Deliberate destruction or "collateral damage" - Israeli attacks on civilian infrastructure (AI Index: MDE 18/007/2006)
- Israel/Lebanon: Under fire - Hizbullah's attacks on northern Israel (AI Index: MDE 02/025/2006)
- Israel/Lebanon: Out of all proportion - civilians bear the brunt of the war (AI Index: MDE 02/033/2006)

• Israel/Lebanon: Israel and Hizbullah must spare civilians - Obligations under international humanitarian law of the parties to the conflict in Israel and Lebanon (AI Index: MDE 15/070/2006)

#### Visits

AI delegates visited Lebanon in January, March, July, August, September and December. In December, AI's Secretary General held meetings in Beirut with the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly and other senior government officials, and visited victims and survivors of the recent war in areas of south Lebanon. AI also called for investigations and reparations for victims of violations during the Hizbullah-Israel war.

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