



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

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Lebanon: Protecting civilians cannot await diplomatic efforts ICJ calls on Hezbollah and Israel to abide by laws of war

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said today that protecting the lives of civilians in Lebanon and Israel cannot wait the outcome of international diplomatic efforts to end the conflict and called on both Hezbollah and the Israeli Defence Forces to distinguish between combatants and civilians and between civilian and military targets, as required by international humanitarian law.

“Civilians in both Israel and Lebanon have paid the tragic price of this conflict. While a ceasefire is imperative, civilians cannot wait for diplomats in New York to agree the text of a resolution. Direct and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects in this conflict must end”, said Nicholas Howen, Secretary-General of the ICJ.

Hezbollah has reportedly fired close to 3,000 rockets into Israeli territory, which have led to the death of more than 30 civilians. The facts indicate that the vast majority of these rockets amount to direct or indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas. Yesterday, 6 August, Hezbollah rockets reportedly killed at least three civilians and injured dozens in Haifa.

“Such deliberate attacks on civilian areas in Israel by Hezbollah must end and those responsible held accountable”, said Nicholas Howen.

The Israeli Defence Forces have targeted and destroyed civilian buildings, means of transportation and other infrastructure in Lebanon, in operations that have reportedly killed hundreds of people, most of them civilians, and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

“The reported facts indicate that Israel’s military response is excessive and disproportionate. We urgently need an official United Nations inquiry into whether Israeli attacks against civilian objects and attacks that led to civilian deaths, such as the destruction of a building in Qana on 30 July and of a farm building in Qaa on 4 August, amount to violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. If so, anyone legally responsible must be held accountable”, said Nicholas Howen.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

33, rue des Bains, P.O. Box 91, 1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland
Tel: +41(0) 22 979 3800 – Fax: +41(0) 22 979 3801 – Website: <http://www.icj.org> - E-mail: info@icj.org

The legitimate right of Israel to defend itself against the launching of rockets by Hezbollah over Israeli territory and the holding of soldiers as hostages cannot justify in international law an excessive or disproportionate response by the Israeli military. Similarly, the response of Israel cannot justify Hezbollah directly or indiscriminately firing at civilians in Israel or holding soldiers as hostages.

Under the laws of war, intentional attacks against the civilian population as such or against civilians not taking part in hostilities, as well as the extensive destruction of civilian property not justified by military necessity, constitute war crimes. The bombing of undefended towns, villages and dwellings that are not military objectives, as well as intentional attacks that knowingly cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians also constitute war crimes. Individuals carrying out such war crimes or ordering them or acquiescing in them can and must be held criminally responsible. Those laws of war apply for both Hezbollah and Israeli Defence Forces.

For further information contact the ICJ, +41 22 979 38 00 or Kirstine Lauridsen, +41 76 562 3810