

Lebanon

Lebanon's tentative steps towards reform and stability following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops came to a halt after war broke out between Hezbollah and Israel on July 12. The 34-day conflict devastated the country and killed an estimated 1,000 civilians.

A UN investigation into the Hariri assassination and 14 other cases continues with the likelihood that the Lebanese government and the UN will establish an international tribunal to try those responsible. However, accountability remains elusive for the families of the approximately 17,000 who "disappeared" during and after Lebanon's deadly civil war (1975-1990).

Palestinian refugees resident in Lebanon continue to face discrimination; Lebanese laws deny them access to adequate housing and certain categories of employment. Iraqis fleeing their war-torn country to Lebanon find themselves facing a real risk of deportation. Despite campaigning by civil society, Lebanese law continues to discriminate against women by, among other things, denying them the right to pass their nationality to their children or spouses. Migrant domestic workers remain particularly at risk of abuse and employers regularly violate their basic rights, with little possibility for legal remedy. Human rights groups operate freely in Lebanon, but some human rights defenders faced harassment in 2006.

War between Hezbollah and Israel

According to the Lebanese government, the Israel-Hezbollah war resulted in 1,189 killed (mostly civilians), 4,399 injured, and an estimated one million displaced. Children accounted for approximately one third of the casualties. Israeli attacks also did massive damage to infrastructure and the natural environment and destroyed at least 15,000 homes. Returnees faced shortages of water and electricity as well as reduced access to health care and other public services. The destruction harmed

virtually all sectors of the country's economy, directly affecting the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese. According to Oxfam, up to 85 percent of Lebanon's farmers lost some or all of their harvest.

In its conduct of hostilities, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) repeatedly violated the laws of war by failing to distinguish between combatants and civilians. The IDF claims that the high proportion of civilian deaths in the war was due to Hezbollah hiding its rockets and fighters in villages and towns, but IDF attacks responsible for a majority of the civilian deaths took place at times when there was no evidence that Hezbollah fighters or weapons were even in the vicinity. While the IDF in certain cases gave advance warnings for civilians to evacuate areas likely to be attacked, such warnings do not relieve a warring party of its obligation to target only combatants. In southern Lebanon, many people remained even after warnings because of age, infirmity, responsibility for livestock and crops, inability to afford exorbitant taxi fares charged for evacuation, or fear of becoming another roadside casualty of IDF bombing. As a result, the IDF's indiscriminate bombardment had devastating consequences for civilians.

Israel's extensive use of cluster munitions also continues to be a pressing concern. The UN has estimated that Israel fired cluster munitions containing 2.6 to 4 million submunitions into Lebanon, leaving behind as many as one million hazardous duds that, at this writing, had resulted in more than 20 deaths and 100 injuries, many of them serious. According to the UN, Israel blanketed much of southern Lebanon with 90 percent of those submunitions in the last three days before the cease-fire.

For its part, Hezbollah launched thousands of rockets on cities, towns, and villages in northern Israel, using a variety of unguided surface-to-surface rockets. These rockets killed 39 Israeli civilians and injured hundreds more. Hezbollah packed some of these rockets with more than 4,000 anti-personnel steel spheres ("ball bearings") that shoot out upon impact, causing many of the civilian deaths and injuries. Hezbollah also fired Chinese-made cluster rockets, each containing 39 explosive submunitions as well as deadly steel spheres. At least 113 such cluster rockets hit Israel, causing one death and 12 injuries, according to Israeli police. The rockets also caused damage to civilian homes, businesses, the natural environment,

and the economy. While Hezbollah appeared to target some of its rockets at military objectives, in some cases hitting them, many of its rockets hit civilian areas, far from any apparent military target. Such attacks—at best indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and, at worst, deliberate attacks against civilians—violated the laws of war.

Investigation into Killing of Rafiq Hariri

The UN-appointed International Independent Investigation Commission continues its investigation into the killing of former Prime Minister Hariri. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1686 in June 2006, which expanded the mandate of the commission to include assisting Lebanese authorities with investigations into other politically motivated assassinations, assassination attempts, and explosions since October 2004.

Lebanese and UN officials made progress toward establishing a tribunal to try those responsible for the Hariri killing, but no final agreement has been reached at this writing. Four former heads of Lebanese intelligence and security services—General ‘Ali al-Hajj, General Raymond Azar, Brigadier General Jamil al-Sayyed and Mustafa Hamdan—remained in detention following their arrest on August 30, 2005.

“Disappearances”

No progress was made in 2006 to uncover the fate of the Lebanese, Palestinians and other nationals who were “disappeared” during and after the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war. The Lebanese government estimates that there were a total of 17,415 such cases, but no criminal investigations or prosecutions had been initiated at this writing. Since April 2005, relatives and friends of the “disappeared” have been holding sit-ins in front of the UN offices in Beirut demanding information on the fate of people still unaccounted for.

According to Lebanese human rights groups, Syria detained at least 640 victims of forced disappearances in Syrian prisons, but an official joint Syrian-Lebanese committee established in May 2005 to investigate the cases had not published any findings at this writing.

Refugees

Palestinians are the largest refugee group in Lebanon with approximately 400,000 Palestinians registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). They are subject to wide-ranging restrictions on housing and work, and their living conditions are poor. In June 2005, the Lebanese government began allowing Palestinian refugees born in Lebanon to work in manual and clerical jobs, but a ban on professional employment remains in place. Non-registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon—a group estimated to number between 3,000 and 5,000—are particularly vulnerable as they do not possess valid identification documents and do not receive any assistance from UNRWA or the Lebanese government.

An estimated 20,000 Iraqis are now living in Lebanon. Lebanon provides no services for them and no process for regularizing their status. It also has failed to date to institute a temporary protection regime for Iraqi asylum seekers, as advocated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and it regularly deports Iraqis who may well have valid persecution claims.

Human Rights Defenders

Human rights groups operate freely in Lebanon, but Lebanese authorities harassed some human rights defenders and groups in 2006. In April, a military court finally dropped all charges against human rights defender and lawyer Dr. Muhamad Mugarby. Military prosecutors had charged Mugarby with the crime of “defaming the military establishment and its officers” after he delivered a speech in November 2003 criticizing the Lebanese government’s practice of using military courts to prosecute civilians for dissent. At this writing, Samira Trad, whose organization Frontiers Center promotes the rights of refugees, continued to face ill-defined defamation charges dating from 2003, apparently related to her work on behalf of refugees.

The offices of *Soutien aux Libanais detenus arbitrairement* (SOLIDA), an organization fighting against the practice of torture, were broken into in October 2006; a computer hard-drive and work files were stolen. The burglary took place the night before the launch of SOLIDA’s report documenting torture practices in the Ministry of Defense’s detention center. The Lebanese police are investigating the burglary.

Discrimination against Women

Despite women's active participation in all aspects of Lebanese society, discriminatory provisions continue to exist in personal status laws, nationality laws, and criminal laws relating to violence in the family. Current Lebanese law does not allow Lebanese women to confer nationality on either their spouses or children.

Women migrants employed as domestic workers face exploitation and abuse by employers, including excessive hours of work and non-payment of wages. Journalists and social activists report that many women migrants suffer physical and sexual abuse at the hands of employers. The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons stated in her February 2006 report that Lebanon is a transit and destination country for large numbers of domestic migrant workers, a considerable number of whom are trafficked into exploitative labor situations.

Key International Actors

The UN Security Council remains actively involved in Lebanese issues. The passage of Resolution 1701 in August 2006 paved the way for a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and created an expanded UNIFIL force in Southern Lebanon. Thousands of UN peacekeepers were deployed to monitor Lebanon's southern border and its territorial waters. Meanwhile, the Security Council continues to follow-up on the implementation of Resolution 1559, which called among other things for the Lebanese government to extend its control over all Lebanese territory, and on the progress of the international investigation into the Hariri assassination.

France and the United States retain a strong role in Lebanon; both countries send senior officials to visit the country regularly. France took the lead in heading the UNIFIL expanded force, and it remains a main driver of Security Council resolutions on Lebanon. The US role in Lebanon became more controversial as a result of the war between Hezbollah and Israel. The US government rejected efforts for an early ceasefire during the war and large segments of the Lebanese population considered the US a party to the war due to its military support of Israel.

Despite the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005, Lebanese-Syrian relations remain tense and complicated. Contentious issues include Syria's

continued refusal to establish diplomatic ties with Lebanon and its ongoing influence on Lebanese affairs. During the war between Hezbollah and Israel, Syria welcomed more than 140,000 Lebanese fleeing areas under attack.

As Hezbollah's main foreign ally, Iran also plays an important role in Lebanon and is seen by many as key to any long-term solution to the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.