



28 July 2006

Dear Foreign Minister,

Amnesty International is writing to you in advance of an extraordinary meeting of the Council of the European Union to urge you to take immediate action to end war crimes and human rights violations committed by both sides in the ongoing armed conflict between Israel and Hizbullah.

Civilians on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border have borne the brunt of this conflict. In Israel, at least 18 civilians have been killed and hundreds of others have been injured by rockets fired into civilian areas of Israel by Hizbullah, while in Lebanon Israeli air attacks and bombardments have killed more than 400 civilians, more than a third of them children, and wounded thousands. More than half a million Lebanese have been displaced by Israeli bombings and threats. Tens of thousands of Israeli civilians have fled their homes in northern Israel fearing further rocket and missile attacks.

Israel has repeatedly bombed residential areas, as well as Lebanon's airports, seaports, scores of roads and bridges and other infrastructure. The destruction by Israel of electricity power plants and other infrastructure has left hospitals, clinics and other medical facilities without the necessary resources and supplies at a time when they have to cope with a massive increase in casualties and an influx of displaced civilians. Vehicles carrying families fleeing their homes in the south and trucks bringing in humanitarian aid have also been bombed. In the last week alone, ambulances and rescue crews have been attacked by Israeli forces as they were evacuating victims of the bombing, and four UN peacekeepers were killed in an Israeli air strike on a UN observation post in south Lebanon, even though the Israeli army had been repeatedly asked by the UN to stop firing in their direction. The humanitarian situation for civilians is worsening both for those remaining in the South and in other areas that are being targeted, and for those who have already been displaced by Israel's military campaign.

As High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, member states of the EU have a responsibility to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. This includes an obligation to ensure that allegations of war crimes are investigated promptly, perpetrators are brought to justice, and victims and their families receive reparations for victims.

And as participating states in the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements between the EU and Israel, and between the EU and Lebanon, EU member states have a responsibility to uphold "respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights."

At this time, when civilians are being exposed to mounting war crimes committed by both sides, Amnesty International urges EU member states to fulfil their responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law and human rights law by taking urgent steps to bring Israel and Hizbullah into compliance with their obligations. In particular, Amnesty International is calling on your government to:

- Jointly, with other EU states, send a clear and powerful message to both Israel and Hizbullah that they must immediately cease attacking civilians and committing other grave breaches of

international humanitarian law – Hizbullah must stop firing rockets into civilian areas of northern Israel and Israel must stop aerial and other attacks and bombardment of civilians and civilian objects.

- Make clear to the parties to the conflict, at the highest level, that it is a war crime to target civilians and civilian objects or to carry out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks and that they are obligated to conduct criminal investigations of anyone suspected of serious violations of international humanitarian law during the conflict.
- Press the parties to the conflict immediately to establish and guarantee humanitarian corridors for the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the conflict and safe passage for humanitarian workers.
- Suspend all sales and transfers of arms and military equipment to the parties to the conflict and ensure adequate oversight arrangements are in place
- Refuse permission for your state's territory to be used by planes or ships carrying arms and military equipment destined for Israel or Hizbullah
- Ask the parties to declare their agreement to use the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC), established under Article 90 of Protocol I relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), to investigate incidents where serious violations of the Geneva Conventions and the Protocol are alleged to have taken place. Scrutiny by the IHFFC will be essential to establish the facts independently and authoritatively. It can also act as a deterrent against further abuses by the parties to the conflict.
- Call for the convening of a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to decide on measures to ensure compliance by the parties with international humanitarian law.

We are asking you to act expeditiously to protect civilians in Lebanon and Israel, ensure respect for international humanitarian law, and prevent impunity for war crimes being committed in this conflict.

Sincerely yours,



Irene Khan

Secretary General