



EMHRN STATEMENT

Human Rights Organisations Appalled by Escalating Violations against Civilians

24 July 2006

In the past few days we have been witnessing a grave escalation in the situation in the Middle East. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), a network of more than 85 Arab, Israeli, Turkish and European human rights organisations, institutions, and individuals in the Euro-Mediterranean region, call upon all parties to the current conflict to refrain from the use of violence against civilian populations and to respect international humanitarian law. We further call upon all parties to immediately bring about a cease-fire to these conflicts in which civilian populations are being indiscriminately hit.

In the last few days we have seen countless attacks on civilian populations on all sides.

The situation in Lebanon and northern Israel

On 12 July 2006 Hizbullah forces engaged Israeli forces capturing two Israeli soldiers.

While Israeli forces have attacked Hizbullah they have also deliberately targeted Lebanese infrastructure objects such as bridges, the Beirut international airport, several ports and an electricity power station, in which at least 300 Lebanese civilians were killed. These attacks constitute collective punishment and are a serious violation of international law.

Hizbullah also launched hundreds of missiles in numerous deliberate attacks against Israeli civilians and population centres in the north of Israel, which have killed civilians in various Israeli towns. These attacks constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

The situation in the Gaza Strip

The Israeli military continues its attacks on civilian targets in the Gaza Strip. There too attacks have been disproportionate, many civilians having been killed and civilian infrastructure destroyed.

Palestinian militants continuously fire Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip, aimed at Israeli civilian population centres in the south of Israel. Here the Palestinian Authority must do its utmost to stop such attacks.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949, the civilian population of an occupied territory is protected persons. Article 27 of the Convention establishes that protected persons "shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof..." Israel, as the Occupying Power, is obliged to comply with these provisions.

The EMHRN urges all parties involved to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The right to self-defence of peoples and States should not be used as a pretext to violate international humanitarian and human rights law. Deliberate attacks of civilians violate these laws and are immoral. In the same way, the duty of States to protect their citizens cannot justify the killing of civilians,

which constitutes a war crime. Furthermore, international humanitarian and human rights law strictly forbids the targeting, intimidation and terrorising of civilians, as well as the application of collective punishment on them.

International humanitarian law requires that the combating sides direct their attacks only against specific military objects, and take cautionary measures to prevent injury to civilians.

In light of all this, the EMHRN calls upon all parties:

- To immediately stop the killing of civilians and bring about a cease-fire in the area to these conflicts in which civilian populations are being indiscriminately hit;
- To refrain from directing attacks against civilian populations and civilian infrastructure;
- To refrain from bombing or deliberately damaging in any way facilities that supply essential services to the civilian populations;
- To refrain from targeting military objectives when it is expected that such attacks would cause excessive harm to civilians, which is clearly the case in these conflicts.

The EMHRN further calls:

- For an end to the Israeli occupation;
- Upon the European Union, European and other states, to promote the universal enforcement of the Geneva Conventions;
- Upon the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to urgently meet and to examine the violations of the Conventions and the ways to remedy the violations;
- Upon the European Union to pressure all parties to respect International Humanitarian Law;
- Upon all parties to respect that prisoners have the rights to medical treatment and not to be submitted to inhuman and degrading treatment as well as having the right to life, in accordance with international law;
- Upon all parties to respect the sovereignty of the State of Lebanon.

The EMHRN finally wishes to remind the European Union that it has commitments not only to respect but also to promote respect for human rights in third countries. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) stipulates that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy aims to 'develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. That is why the EU should rely on the Association Agreements which it has entered with the parties concerned in order to demand that human rights be respected.

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