



Promoting critical debate and accountability of human rights NGOs in the Arab-Israeli conflict

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## August 29 2006, Overkill: NGO Responses to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon Conflict

During the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict, major human rights and humanitarian aid NGOs issued numerous statements about the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. These statements disproportionately focused on allegations of Israeli “war crimes” and “violations of international law” while giving much less attention to Hezbollah, including [the approximately 4,000 rockets](#) fired at Israeli towns and cities in four weeks, and the militia's use of human shields. The following is a summary of the detailed NGO Monitor analysis of these issues ( [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile/lebanon\\_update.html](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile/lebanon_update.html) )

### Number of Statements and Reports per NGO between 12 July and 15 August 2006

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Amnesty International - 18                                  | 10. KAIROS – 1                               |
| 2. B'Tselem - 1  | 11. Medecins Sans Frontieres - 3             |
| 3. Christian Aid - 8   | 12. MIFTAH - 6                               |
| 4. EMHRN - 2   | 13. Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA) - 2          |
| 5. EuroMed – 1   | 14. Oxfam - 9                                |
| 6. Human Rights Watch – 24                                     | 15. Physicians for Human Rights - Israel – 1 |
| 7. ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) – 1     | 16. PNGO – Palestinian NGO Network - 2       |
| 8. International Commission of Jurists - 2                     | 17. UNICEF – 2                               |
| 9. International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) – 4 | 18. War on Want – 1                          |
|  | 19. World Vision International – 6           |

**Total: 94 Statements**

**Examples:** “The pattern of Israeli behavior in southern Lebanon suggests a deliberate policy...Israel blames Hezbollah for the massive civilian toll in Lebanon, claiming that they are...fighting from within the civilian population. This is a convenient excuse”, Op-Ed in *The Guardian*, July 31 by **Human Rights Watch** Emergencies Director Peter Bouckaert

“Israel must put an immediate end to attacks against civilians”, **Amnesty International**, July 13 Press Release

“The force being used by the Israeli troops ...is inhuman and savage, aiming at exterminating as many people as possible. This brings to our minds the force used by Serbia in Bosnia as well as the crimes against humanity committed in the Second World War”, **Palestinian NGO Network** (PNGO), July 24 open letter to Condoleezza Rice

### **Common themes in the NGO statements include:**

- Accusations of "disproportionate force" by Israel, with no explanation of what would comprise a proportionate response to Hezbollah terror and missile attacks launched;
- Judgements and claims regarding "military targets" in the context of asymmetric warfare that most humanitarian and human rights NGOs are not equipped to make;
- Condemnation of Israel's targeting of bridges, major roads and the Beirut Airport as "collective punishment," despite the clear military rationale of sealing off air and sea ports, roads and other such targets to prevent the re-supply of arms from Syria and Iran.
- Political lobbying such as sending letters to politicians demanding that pressure be brought to bear on Israel; calling for the review of trade agreements and similar campaigns.
- Little mention that Hezbollah's concrete reinforced military headquarters are located under buildings in southern Beirut, and that the positioning of military/guerrilla installations in residential areas is considered a war crime, as defined by Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Convention, article 51(7), relating to human shields. Hezbollah also stores and launches missiles from civilian villages in southern Lebanon, but NGOs dismiss or ignore the human rights implications of Hezbollah's use of human shields.
- Minimal references to the role of Iran and Syria in providing missiles and support to Hizbollah, and other context-related details;
- Few NGOs call for the release of the two abducted Israeli soldiers, and there is little attention given to Israeli IDPs (internally displaced persons) [numbering approximately 500,000](#), or to Israeli victims of Hezbollah rocket attacks.