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Israel using banned cluster and vacuum bombs and white phosphorous against civilians in Lebanon

Meris Lutz and Mohammed Zaatari 20 Jul 2006 18:18 GMT

Single strike on Civil Defense post kills 20 civilians
Separate attack claims lives of 18 villagers heeding warning to flee

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Monday, July 17, 2006

By

Daily Star staff

BEIRUT/SOUTH LEBANON: At 6 p.m. Sunday, people with access to television listened in horror as LBC correspondent Haidar Houeila broke down on the air, describing the gruesome scene at the site of an Israeli strike against a Civil Defense outpost in Tyre that was housing scores of civilians.

"I can see parts of bodies, lots of families..." he said, his voice rising in terror. "It's all residential, there's nothing, nothing military here."

At least 20 civilians were killed and over 50 wounded, including an American woman who reportedly told Houeila: "Let this be a message to George Bush." At the time of the report, the death toll in Lebanon had passed 120. By 8 p.m. it was at least 140.

The strike happened as reports came that Israel was using internationally banned cluster and vacuum bombs and white phosphorous against civilians in Southern Lebanon.

"We have preliminary reports about unusual injuries that are different from injuries incurred from regular explosions - severe, abnormal burns," said Health Minister Mohammad Khalife, stressing that the reports had not been confirmed.

"We have a plan but we cannot make things more chaotic than they are. Health officials are there but to launch instructions without confirmation would do more harm than good," he said.

On Saturday, Israeli planes struck two pick-up trucks packed with evacuees from Marwaheen who had responded to warnings to leave their village.

The trucks, carrying over 30 people, had been turned away after attempting to seek refuge at a UN compound. They were less than 2 kilometers away when they were struck by Israeli missiles, killing 18 people, 11 of them children.

A Daily Star correspondent who arrived three hours later reported charred human limbs scattered over the area, creating a stench that reached as far as 50 meters away.

French and Italian UNIFIL soldiers appeared shocked at the ghastliness of the scene. One nurse burst into tears.

The team extinguished fires and collected the pieces of bodies before heading to the nearest hospital.

After the incident, Israel said it regretted civilians casualties, but maintained Hizbullah was intentionally operating from civilian areas.

Three more civilians were killed Saturday during an air raid on the Beirut-Damascus Highway, and five others were killed in the South, including one Egyptian national.

At least one man died and two others were wounded in an Israeli raid Saturday night on the Deir Qanoun River leading to the Abbassieh area. Hassan Hariri was killed, while his wife Amina Hammoud and a baby whose name was not disclosed were wounded.

An Israeli raid on the house of Ramez Zayyat in Bourj al-Shemali Sunday claimed the life of Zayyat's wife, step-sister and two children, leaving ten others wounded.

In Jibsheit, near Nabatieh, Israeli fire hit the house of Adel Hajj Melhem, killing Abdel-Hassan Omeis and a Sri Lankan house maid. Eleven others were wounded in the attack and transferred to the Sheikh Ragheb Harb Hospital in Toul. Others killed in the series of raids on Nabatieh included Mohammed Zreiq; Adel, Maryam, Hana, Dalal and Najiba Melhem; an Iraqi national and a baby who was not identified.

Karim Qobeisi, 2, was also injured in air strikes on Nabatieh.

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"At least Karim is alive," said his father, Laqis, as surgeons worked to remove shrapnel from the toddler's body.

Many residents, such as Mohammad Moqalled from Hay al-Rahbat, say they will stay in Nabatieh despite the danger.

"Sidon, Tripoli, and Baalbek are not safe, just like Nabatieh," he said. "Death is death whether here or there."

Issam Hur scoffed at Israeli evacuation orders.

"We have paid a heavy price for the liberation of the South, and we will stay here," he said, brandishing a bottle of milk.

In Zibdeen, medics were unable to identify a woman killed by Israeli shelling. The wounded were identified as Wassim Faqih, Mohammed Qobeisi, Nahza Mantash, Fadi Banout, Abdullah Tarraf Suleiman, Abdullah Jaafar, Zainab and Kawthar Barjawi, Qassm Kawtharani and Ahmad Huballah.

Six civilians, three of them children, were killed late Sunday when Israel struck the Southern village of Aitarun.

Unconfirmed casualties were also reported in the cities of Zebdine and Naqoura.

In Baalbek, an unidentified victim was rushed to the Dar Al-Amal University Hospital after a bombing. - With agencies

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