

## **Israel: End of Lebanon fighting allows displaced Israelis to go home**

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Several hundred thousand people fled northern Israel for the centre and south of the country during the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah which lasted from mid-July to mid-August 2006. Most of the assistance to the displaced was provided by Israeli NGOs, Jewish voluntary agencies and individuals. Following a cessation of hostilities, most of the displaced returned home. The Israeli government, which was slow initially to respond to IDPs' needs, has now promised \$2 billion to rebuild northern Israeli towns hardest hit by Hezbollah rockets.

The fighting between Israel and Hezbollah began on 12 July after the Islamist militia attacked across the Lebanese-Israel border and captured two Israeli soldiers. Israel retaliated with a month-long military offensive targeting Hezbollah strongholds all over Lebanon, which also caused heavy damage to civilian infrastructure. Meanwhile, Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets into Israel, hitting northern Israel, a region which is home to 1.5 million people, and in particular the northern cities of Haifa, Kiryat Shmona, Safed, Karmiel, Tiberias and Nahariya. Most of the Hezbollah rockets appear to have been directed at civilian areas and hit pedestrians, hospitals, schools, homes and businesses (HRW, 5 August 2006). At least 43 civilians died in northern Israel – seven of them children – and 300-500,000 fled their homes (Israeli foreign ministry, 23 August 2006; Brookings, 15 August 2006, “Koser”). In the meantime, in Lebanon, over 1,000 people died, and close to a million were displaced due to Israeli attacks (AI, 23 August 2006). *For more information on IDPs in Lebanon, please see IDMC's [Lebanon country page](#).*

Most of the displaced left for the centre and south of Israel. In the absence of a government evacuation system, people who fled the north did so under their own steam, or with the help of NGOs. For example, two local NGOs, Migdal Or and Orot Hesed, between them relocated some 45,000 people to stay with families throughout the rest of the country (JBI, 15 August 2006). In addition, up to one million either stayed in bomb shelters, hid at home or alternated between the two (Brookings, 15 August 2006, “Koser”). Those who stayed behind did so because of their work, because they refused to be chased out by Hezbollah, or because they were too weak or too old to leave (AFP, 4 August 2006). Many of the shelters were described as crowded, with little or no fresh air, and dirty (JBI, 15 August 2006; IRIN, 12 August 2006). The situation of Arab Israeli residents in towns hit by the rockets was particularly difficult.

Most did not have relatives to stay with in safer parts of the country, and many could not find safety in their towns, as Arab towns generally lack public infrastructure, including bomb shelters (NYT, 31 July 2006; IRIN, 6 August 2006).

IDPs found refuge in the centre and south of the country with relatives or strangers who opened their homes, but also in ho-tels and in tents (IRIN, 15 August 2006). Most of the assistance was provided by Israeli NGOs, Jewish voluntary agencies and individuals. According to NGOs pre-sent on the ground, private individuals in Israel and Jewish communities around the world sent thousands of food pack-ages and millions of dollars to help the displaced (IRIN, 6 August 2006). An Is-raeli billionaire even funded a “tent city” for 6,100 IDPs, which reportedly cost \$500,000 a day to run (NYT, 31 July 2006). About 40,000 children from the north were also taken to special summer camps in central Israel, to put them out of harm’s way (Jewish Agency, 20 August 2006). The Israeli Prime Minister’s Of-fice established an agency to deal with the crisis but this agency was still in its organisational stages as of mid-August 2006 (JBI, 15 August 2006). The state has primarily relied on NGOs to care for the displaced, a consequence of the fact that in the past 20 years, the state has in-deed become dependent on civil society following the privatisation of a large number of welfare, education and health services (Ha’aretz, 24 August 2006).

Following a cessation of hostilities on 14 August based on UN Security Council resolution 1701, most IDPs and those liv-ing in bomb shelters cautiously returned to their homes in northern Israel (IRIN, 17 August 2006). Those too weak or too old to return on their own were assisted by organisations like Magen David Adom, a member of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (MDA, 24 August 2006). Once home, many had to cope with the trauma linked to displacement. The Israeli Ministry of Education’s psy-chological counselling service received hundreds of appeals from parents con-cerned about symptoms of anxiety in their children (Ha’aretz, 22 August 2006). The Mayor of the northern city of Nahariya decided to delay the start of the school term by two weeks, due to the dif-ficulties the city endured during the war (Ha’aretz, 21 August 2006, “school”).

Economic and social life was also para-lysed during the month of conflict, and many businesses were reportedly going to close down because of the amount of physical damage sustained in the north (JBI, 15 August 2006). Thousands of homes, schools, businesses, synagogues and cars were damaged or destroyed by Hezbollah rockets, and the Israeli gov-ernment had received more than 7,600 claims for compensation as of mid-August 2006 (Y net, 14 August 2006). Many crops were lost as well (JBI, 15 August 2006). The Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, under fire for his govern-ment's handling of the war in Lebanon, promised \$2 billion to rebuild northern Israeli towns hardest hits by Hezbollah rockets (Reuters, 24 August 2006). The Israeli Minis-try of Tourism also an-nounced that the government had agreed to compensate hotel-iers and businesses involved in tourism in the affected areas of Israel’s north (IRIN, 15 August 2006, “tourism”).

In the absence of an official declaration of a state of war, laws in place create two categories of victims, who are entitled to compensation based on different rules. The first group is made up of those who have businesses in communities de-scribed as being on the front line, who have to be compensated fully for the loss of income, accord-ing to the law. The sec-ond group consists of people whose busi-nesses are not on the

frontline, but were exposed to rockets. The vast majority of the business owners in the north fall into the second category and will receive less compensation as a result. According to the Israeli paper Ha'aretz, four Arab communities hit by the rockets which had been part of the first group were taken off the list, for reasons which remain unclear. Several business owners from these communities filed an appeal to the Supreme Court (Ha'aretz, 21 August 2006, "compensation").

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Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

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