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## Lebanon: displaced return amidst growing political tension

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*Some 200,000 people are estimated to remain in a situation of internal displacement in Lebanon following the hostilities between the Shiite militant and political organisation Hezbollah and Israeli security forces in summer 2006. Nearly one million people were displaced at the height of the conflict – the vast majority of them within Lebanon. Most of the displaced returned to their homes in south Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut immediately following a UN-brokered ceasefire in August 2006. However the destruction of homes and infrastructure, the presence of cluster bombs, and loss of livelihoods are significant obstacles to the return and sustainable reintegration of displaced people. In addition, the overall stability of the country is in doubt as disputes have intensified between Lebanon's diverse political parties.*

*Internal displacement is not a new phenomenon in Lebanon. A significant number of people remain displaced from the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990 and as a result of Israeli invasions and occupation of part of south Lebanon. No updated reliable survey exists to determine the current number and estimates range hugely, between 16,750 and 600,000. Lack of adequate compensation and reconciliation are among the key factors preventing this group of displaced people from returning.*

## Background and main causes

Internal displacements in Lebanon have not been continuous, but occurred in separate periods of the civil war (1975-1990) due to internal strife and Israeli military operations in Lebanon between 1978 and 2000. More recently, Israeli military operations in Lebanon following clashes between Israeli security forces and Hizbollah, the Lebanese militant and political organisation, caused a new wave of displacement in the summer of 2006.

### *Civil war and Israeli invasions*

It is estimated that at the height of the civil war up to one million people were displaced. A first wave of population displacement occurred in 1975 when Beirut was divided into Muslim and Christian sectors, although the fragmentation was more complex than a Muslim-Christian split and included divisions between sects within the two religions (Stamm, 2006). In 1985, an estimated 367,000 people were displaced in the Mount Lebanon region. Hundreds of thousands more people were displaced as a result of Israeli military invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. In 1989, violent fighting between Lebanese militias and Syrian troops and between militias themselves led to further displacement. A ceasefire was declared in October 1989 when Lebanese parliamentarians signed the Document of National Understanding (the "Taif Agreement") which was drafted following extensive negotiations between the different militias along with Syria in an attempt to reach consensus on internal political reform. In 1990, it was estimated that approximately 450-500,000 people were internally displaced

(UNDP 2002). In 1996, Israeli air raids and rocket attacks on Beirut and southern Lebanon caused displacement of still hundred of thousands more people (Assaf and El-Fil, April 2000; LNF 2001; ILO, 1997).

The most affected areas of internal displacement were the Mount Lebanon region, specifically in the provinces (cazas) of Aley, Chouf and Baabda where an estimated 62 per cent of IDPs originated, and south Lebanon, where an estimated 24 per cent of the IDP population originated (USCR 2003; UNDP 2002). Although the civil war ended in 1990, the far south and southeast of Lebanon remained occupied by Israel for another ten years. During this period, hundreds if not thousands of Lebanese were ordered to leave their homes in the occupied zone, many expelled for suspected or admitted participation in attacks on Israeli military personnel (Harik, 7 December 2006; HRW, 1 July 1999). Displaced people from the south began to return home when Israeli troops withdrew from the area in May 2000 (UNSC Resolution 425 (1978)). Syria maintained a military presence in Lebanon until April 2005 when it withdrew its troops under national and international pressure following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 (UNSC Resolution 1559 (2004)).

There are large disparities in estimates of people internally displaced, IDP population movements and geographical distribution because the conflict caused both temporary and permanent displacements over an extended period of time (ILO, 1997). There is no international or national non-governmental organisation monitoring the situation of people dis-

placed during this period. For a number of years, the US Department of State has reported that there continued to be 600,000 IDPs in Lebanon (US DOS, 8 March 2006). The US Committee for Refugees reported half this number in 2005 and 50,000–500,000 the year before (USCR, 2005 and 2004). However, the methodology underlying these figures is not clear. The government figure is significantly lower than these estimates. The government estimates that there are currently 16,750 people who continue to be in a situation of internal displacement as a result of the civil war and Israeli invasions up to 2000 (MoD, 10 July 2006).

#### *Hostilities of July-August 2006*

Cross-border clashes and exchanges of fire between Hizbollah and Israeli security forces along the Blue Line, the UN-established demarcation line separating Israel and Lebanon, have taken place regularly since 2000. Heavy exchanges of fire occurred in February and May 2006 and Israeli air incursions into Lebanese airspace continued to be regularly reported throughout the year (UNSC, 21 July 2006).

In July 2006, Hizbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers during cross-border clashes with Israeli security forces which led Israel to respond with major military operations including aerial bombardments causing massive displacement. Hizbollah retaliated with rocket attacks on northern Israel. The conflict affected the entire country, especially southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut as well as the Bekaa valley in eastern Lebanon. According to the Lebanese authorities, the conflict resulted in 1,191

deaths and 4,409 injuries (HRC, 13 December 2006). Human rights and humanitarian organisations have called into question the proportionality of Israel's response and noted that the consistent failure of Israel to distinguish between combatants and civilians is in contravention with international law, calling for investigation into particular incidents such as Israeli air strikes that killed 28 persons in their home in Qana (HRW, 30 July 2006; MSM, 12 October 2006).

The main causes of internal displacement were indiscriminate attacks by Israel on civilians and civilian property and infrastructure, as well as a general climate of fear and panic among the civilian population caused by warnings, threats and attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces (COI, 10 November 2006). In addition, Israel imposed a blockade on the country and launched large-scale air strikes on key infrastructure such as the Beirut airport and port, strategic roads and bridges. Israeli forces occupied some areas of southern Lebanon (UNSC, 21 July 2006). Throughout the conflict, Israel regularly dropped leaflets across Lebanon warning the population to flee ahead of air strikes although in some cases people were unable to leave their homes, notably in southern Lebanon, for reasons including the destruction of bridges and roads or because they lacked transport or were physically unable to flee (UNSC, 21 July 2006; COI, 10 November 2006; OHCHR, 31 July 2006).

Displaced people were also targeted by Israeli military as they fled their villages. On 15 July, a group of displaced people leaving the village of Marwaheen were killed by Israeli fire as they fled their village. A convoy of displaced people

evacuated by the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from the same village was also targeted the following day (UNSC, 21 July 2006). On 17 July, a convoy of displaced people fleeing the village of Rmayleh were killed by air raids (LHRA, 8 August 2006). Another convoy of people fleeing the town of Marjayoun, led by the UNIFIL, came under attack on 11 August (Ibid).

Nearly one million Lebanese were displaced between 12 July and 14 August, almost one quarter of the population. The government estimates that 974,184 people were displaced in total of which approximately 730,000 were displaced internally while some 230,000 fled the country (HRC, November 2006). This figure includes the secondary displacement of an estimated 16,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 3 August 2006). Some people were displaced several times during the conflict because the areas they fled to were subsequently shelled. At the height of the conflict as many as 128,000 displaced people were sheltering in public schools around the country, while others sought shelter in public buildings, garages and parks (OCHA, 4 August 2006). The majority of displaced sheltered with family and extended relatives or were taken in by host communities.

An internationally-brokered ceasefire led to a cessation in fighting on 14 August and prompted the return of most displaced people. The total destruction of entire towns such as Bint Jbeil or Khiam in the south, and of large neighbourhoods in the southern suburbs of Beirut, has however resulted in the continued displacement of around 200,000 people, most of whom are living with relatives

and host families, according to the government (GoL, 31 August 2006). However, no registration or assessment has been undertaken to assess the number and location of the displaced.

### **Protection concerns and challenges to return**

The cessation of hostilities prompted large-scale population return, but in many affected areas, the conditions are not in place to allow for safe and sustainable return of IDPs to their homes. Secondary displacements are occurring and agencies such as UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, suggest that there is a strong likelihood that secondary displacements will continue in the next 12-24 months because of factors including destroyed homes, presence of unexploded ordnance in homes and fields, lack of livelihoods, and the upcoming winter (UNHCR, 15 November 2006).

A significant obstacle to the safety of displaced people, returnees and local communities is the widespread presence of unexploded ordnance and mines, notably in south Lebanon. Demining organisations estimate up to one million cluster bombs are scattered in more than 800 locations in the area between the Litani River and the Lebanese-Israeli border (MACC SL, 4 November 2006). According to figures in November, cluster bombs have killed 22 people and caused more than 130 injuries (Ibid). The majority of deaths have occurred while returnees have been examining the extent of damage to their homes. The highest numbers of victims have been men, as in many cases they have been the first to return to assess the damage done to the

home before the rest of the family returned (NDO, 6 November 2006).

Cluster bombs are also having a devastating impact on the economic livelihoods of returning displaced people and local communities of southern Lebanon, as many farmers are unable to access fields and collect harvests. In some villages of south Lebanon and especially in the southern districts of Beirut, the conflict has worsened the situation of communities already affected by poverty (COI, 10 November 2006; IRIN, 25 October 2005). Several hundred thousand landmines and unexploded ordnance also remain in the area, which were planted by Israeli forces prior to Israel's withdrawal in 2000. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 calls on Israel to provide the UN with all maps of remaining landmines and locations of cluster bombs in order to facilitate their removal (UNSC, 12 September 2006); as of December 2006, there were no indications that Israel had complied fully with this request.

Widespread destruction of homes poses a further impediment to returns. Many families have returned to their homes only to find them demolished or damaged. The government estimates that 30,000 homes were destroyed and a similar number of houses have been assessed as having major damage (HRC, November 2006). The government has indicated its intention to provide prefabricated housing as a temporary solution for people whose homes have been completely destroyed; despite criticism by international organisations that deem it unpractical and an unsustainable solution (HRC, 1 September 2006). Many villages have suffered extensive destruction of public infrastructure, including damage to basic

services like electricity and water, hospitals and fuel reservoirs. UN and local organisations also report a widespread need for psychosocial support for people suffering from trauma as a result of the war, in particular children (UNHCR, 15 November 2006).

Ultimately, the identification of durable solutions for the displaced in Lebanon is dependent on stability and security in the country, but while the ceasefire has remained, with some infractions, there has been an increase in tensions between political parties in Lebanon. The security situation has been volatile following renewed debates on the achievement of a national political consensus and calls for the reform of political and administrative structures (UNSC, 18 August 2006). The resignation of several ministers along with the assassination of a prominent minister in November and disputes between the various political groups indicates the fragility of the current government. Lebanon's domestic disputes are also strongly linked to issues which have an international stake, including the establishment of an international court for the trial of suspects of the killing of Prime Minister Hariri, international pressure for the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon, violations of Lebanese sovereignty by Israel, an Israel-Lebanese prisoner exchange, and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict that is linked to the delineation of disputed borders like the Sheba'a Farms territory, considered by the UN as Israeli-occupied Syrian territory but claimed by Lebanon, and Ghajar village, a Lebanese village that remains partly occupied by Israel.

### **Complexity of property compensation and distribution of assistance**

Due to the widespread destruction of private property during the recent conflict, compensation for damages and reconstruction assistance will be paramount to enable sustainable return of the displaced. In the aftermath of the conflict, Hizbollah through its reconstruction arm, Jihad Al-Bina, began making payments in cash to assist displaced people whose homes had been demolished to pay rent in temporary accommodation. Jihad Al-Bina also conducted damage assessments and began making compensation payments to people for demolished and damaged houses; however these payments were suspended owing to disputes with local people but are scheduled to begin again. In October 2006, the government established a compensation mechanism to compensate for damage to private property (Decision No.130/2006 Presidency of the Council of Ministers) which will work through the Council of the South, a regional governmental office established in the 1990s to determine the needs of people in the south. The government is also establishing a second separate mechanism to compensate property damage in southern Beirut. Property compensation in the southern districts of Beirut will be particularly challenging as much construction took place without a legal basis. As of the end of October, the government had started making compensation payments to people in south Lebanon but the process is extremely slow (GoL, 21 November 2006). In addition, some donors, mainly Arab countries, have started an "Adopt a Village" approach, whereby donors assist specific villages with reconstruction; this includes distribution of re-

construction assistance payments to property owners (Ibid).

Conflicting assessments done by the Council of the South and Jihad Al-Bina and competing compensation schemes have resulted in confusion for people awaiting money to rebuild their homes and raise the possibility of duplication of assistance (COI, 10 November 2006; UNHCR, 6 December 2006). There is growing evidence that political divisions at the municipal level have impeded the distribution of assistance and may eventually endanger the entire reconstruction process (UNHCR, 6 December 2006). For example, the selection of some villages to rebuild by donors also means that others will be left out which may in practice amount to discrimination (COI, 10 November 2006, p.72). Similarly, with several organisations working on reconstruction and compensation, there is a strong risk of overlap (Ibid). In south Lebanon, the authorities and other organisations have in part tried to address these concerns by establishing guidelines to ensure coordination between partners and to avoid discrimination (Ibid). However, it is likely that people may not have full and equal access to assistance because of inadequate monitoring of aid distribution to displaced people and other affected communities (UNHCR, November 2006).

### **Unresolved issues for civil war displaced**

There is little information about the situation of those who remain displaced because of fighting during the civil war period. The laggardly return process of these communities has been identified as

an unresolved post-civil war issue in Lebanon (Assaf and El-Fil, April 2000; USCR, 24 May 2004). The stalemate in returns has been attributed to a number of factors including mishandling of funds and political rivalries between government officials, budgetary problems and the lack of suitable economic and social conditions in rural areas (US DOS, 25 February 2004; Caritas, August 2004; UNDP 2002). NGO and news reports suggest that in many areas only 20-30 per cent of the displaced have returned (Lebanon Wire, 8 July 2002; Daily Star, 1 June 2005; Caritas, 2004; IRIN, 5 January 2006). According to the government, 470,510 people have been able to return to their area of origin with financial assistance (MoD, 10 July 2006). The primary areas where IDPs have not returned are Kfar Selouan, Ain Drafil, Kfar Matta, Aabey, and Breeh (MoD, Ibid).

An outstanding issue for the civil war displaced is the payment of compensation (MoD, 10 July 2006; IRIN, 5 January 2006). Many displaced people say that they have only received partial compensation and are unable to return permanently because their homes are uninhabitable (Caritas, August 2004; Daily Star, 29 September 2006). Other obstacles to return include the occupation of properties by other displaced, and lack of job opportunities and basic infrastructure in affected areas (UNDP, 9 June 2006; IRIN, 5 January 2006; MoD, 10 July 2006). The lack of reconciliation between displaced and host communities in certain areas caused by sectarian divisions created by the civil war also pose a barrier to return (Ibrahim, 7 February 2001; MoD, 30 June 2004; Daily Star, 29 April 2004). This has been the case in Breeh in Chouf, Kfar Selouan in Metn,

and Kfar Matta, among others (Monday Morning, 30 April 2003; GoL, 30 June 2004; ILO, 1997; Daily Star, 28 July 2005). In June 2006, the national authorities announced that reconciliation between Druze and Christians was needed in several villages to facilitate return (Daily Star, 7 August 2005).

Many people who fled south Lebanon during the Israeli occupation of parts of the area moved to the southern suburbs of Beirut. With the bombing of these districts in the recent conflict, the distinctions between these people and the new Shiite displaced communities are blurred. Prior to the 2006 conflict, the southern suburbs of Beirut were overcrowded and suffered severe infrastructural problems due to the influx of displaced people to the area and destruction caused by civil war battles. The extensive demolition of the southern suburbs in the recent conflict poses obstacles to the return for both groups (Harik, 7 December 2006).

### **National response**

The Lebanese government was not prepared for the sudden onset and magnitude of displacement caused by the recent war and the bulk of the response came from local NGOs, political organisations, local authorities and volunteers who supported the displaced, ranging from basic provision of relief to running IDP sites. In the aftermath of the war, the government has put together a recovery plan, with the support of the international community, and has begun implementation of a broad range of assistance, recovery and reconstruction activities. The slow pace of the government efforts has attracted criticism in comparison with the more efficient

reconstruction and assistance efforts of Hizbollah although the whole process of assisting the displaced risks failure because of duplication and growing political tensions in the country (Schenker, 14 September 2006; UNHCR, 6 December 2006). The Higher Relief Commission (HRC) is the government office responsible for humanitarian coordination, including assistance to the newly internally displaced. The HRC coordinates with key ministries, including the Central Fund for the Displaced, the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Council of the South. Political organisations, notably Hizbollah, remain key actors in the distribution of assistance, social services and reconstruction. The government has deployed 15,000 troops to south Lebanon in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

There is no revised national IDP strategy and it is not yet apparent how the government will coordinate its response to the differing situations of the recently displaced and those displaced over a decade ago. In the 1990s the government had designed a comprehensive return programme, including compensation to IDPs to rebuild their homes, support for the reconciliation process between residents and returnees, and socio-economic rehabilitation to address the civil war situation of displacement (MoD, 10 July 2006). The 1989 Taif Agreement codified the return of IDPs as an essential condition for reconciliation and peace and binds the authorities to establish legislation that safeguards the right to return and ensures the means for return and reconstruction (GoL, 30 June 2004; Assaf and El-Fil, April 2000; Taif Agreement 1989). A Ministry for the Displaced was established to rehabilitate infrastructure

and housing, improve the economic sector, and to achieve national reconciliation, and a Central Fund for the Displaced was created to finance the return of the displaced. Both institutions are also involved in the response to the displacement caused by the recent conflict.

According to government representatives, the absence of funds has prevented the development of a national strategy for the return of people displaced by the civil war and as a result of the Israeli occupation (GoL, 30 June 2004; MoD, 10 July 2006). In October 2005, the Minister of the Displaced threatened to resign if his ministry was not granted the necessary funds for the return of the remaining internally displaced (Daily Star, 10 October 2005). However, the ministry has also come under criticism for mismanagement of funds and political corruption (ILO 1997; Caritas, August 2004; Assaf and El-Fil, 7 April 2000; Daily Star, 18 February 2004 and 29 September 2006). Prior to the recent breakout of hostilities, the ministry continued to focus its efforts on reconciliation agreements between communities including resolution of disputes between individual families in order to facilitate returns, including in several towns around Aley, east of Beirut (Daily Star, 17 June 2005 and 28 July 2005; MoD, 10 July 2006).

### **International response**

Prior to 2006, international agencies focused their efforts on broader development work and security in Lebanon and for the most part have not been involved in responding to the needs of displaced and returnee populations from the civil

war period. Since 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been present in south Lebanon to maintain peace and security in the area (UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 (1978)). No international organisation has been monitoring or advocating for the rights of displaced people. The United Nations Development Programme was the only UN agency implementing a return programme for displaced people in the Mount Lebanon region. The programme was launched over ten years ago and is expected to continue in 2007, although no up-to-date information is available on the impact of this programme.

In contrast, the recent conflict initiated widespread mobilisation and financial support among UN and international humanitarian agencies and donors; however, on the ground many international organisations faced difficulty in assisting IDPs due to factors including the highly politicised environment, the lack of a presence in the country, security restrictions and widespread destruction of infrastructure which severely limited free movement. In addition, the Israeli military forces refused to ensure safety for aid convoys and on several occasions targeted humanitarian convoys, thereby obstructing agencies from providing assistance to displaced and host communities (ICRC, 10 August 2006; WFP, 10 August 2006; COI, 10 November 2006, p.41).

The “cluster approach” was applied in Lebanon; this is a humanitarian coordination mechanism whereby certain UN agencies are assigned lead roles by sector in order to improve the efficiency of humanitarian response by ensuring greater

cooperation, accountability and partnership between the UN, the Red Cross and Crescent Movement and national and international non-governmental organisations. The cluster leadership role in protection and emergency shelter for IDPs was assumed by UNHCR. Although on the whole successful, an evaluation of the application of the mechanism in Lebanon also points to a number of areas for improvement (UNHCR, October 2006). In addition, while there were supportive local NGOs and government representatives who participated actively in the clusters, a concern that emerged was that many of the key local NGOs and government ministries did not participate because of lack of information of the benefits of the mechanism.

At the political level, the international response to the conflict between Hizbollah and Israel was widely criticised as a belated one given the consequences for civilians. Nor did it resolve the underlying causes of the conflict. However consensus on a ceasefire was reached with UN Security Council resolution 1701 which also provides for an expanded UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, tasked among other things with supporting the safe return of displaced persons.

In response to extensive criticism that Israeli military operations in Lebanon were in contravention of international law, a High Level Commission of Inquiry was established by the UN in August 2006 in the context of the Human Rights Council. The Commission is mandated to investigate the systematic targeting and killing of civilians by Israel in Lebanon, examine the types of weapons used by Israel and their conformity with international law; and assess the extent and im-

pact of Israeli attacks on human life, property and the environment. In the first draft of its report, the Commission found that the internal displacement which occurred in Lebanon constituted in itself a violation of international law and human rights, given that displacement was the result of indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian property that were, in many cases, disproportionate in nature and could not be justified on the basis of military necessity (COI, 10 November 2006, p.48).

*Note: This is a summary of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Lebanon. The full country profile is available online [here](#).*

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**World Food Programme (WFP)**, 10 August 2006, WFP paralysed in efforts to reach suffering people of south Lebanon, Press Release

Note: All documents used in this profile summary are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of the Lebanon country page.

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

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.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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