

Lebanon: Hezbollah Rocket Attacks on Haifa Designed to Kill Civilians

Anti-personnel Ball Bearings Meant to Harm “Soft” Targets

(New York, July 18, 2006) – Hezbollah's attacks in Israel on Sunday and Monday were at best indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas, at worst the deliberate targeting of civilians. Either way, they were serious violations of international humanitarian law and probable war crimes, Human Rights Watch said today.

In addition, the warheads used suggest a desire to maximize harm to civilians. Some of the rockets launched against Haifa over the past two days contained hundreds of metal ball bearings that are of limited use against military targets but cause great harm to civilians and civilian property. The ball bearings lodge in the body and cause serious harm.

Hezbollah has reportedly fired more than 800 rockets into Israel from southern Lebanon over the past five days, killing 12 civilians and wounding many more. The vast majority of these rockets, as in past conflicts, have been Katyushas, which are small, have a range limited to the border area, and cannot be aimed with precision. Hezbollah has also fired some rockets in the current fighting that have landed up to 40 kilometers inside Israel.

“Attacking civilian areas indiscriminately is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and can constitute a war crime,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, director of the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch. “Hezbollah’s use of warheads that have limited military use and cause grievous suffering to the victims only makes the crime worse.”

On Monday, Human Rights Watch researchers inspected a three-story apartment building in Haifa's Bat Galim neighborhood after it was struck by a rocket around 3:00 p.m., causing extensive damage to the top two floors and wounding six residents, one of them seriously. They collected metal ball bearings that had pierced the walls of the apartment building across the street and car windshields up to one block away.

An Israeli ordinance removal expert at the scene told Human Rights Watch that the rocket used in the attack had a 240mm warhead. According to media reports, Hezbollah announced that it had fired dozens of Raad 2 and Raad 3 anti-tank missiles into Haifa in response to “aggressions against various Lebanese regions.” An Israeli military official told the press on Sunday that Hezbollah had fired at least three Syrian-made Fajr-3 missiles.

On Sunday, a Hezbollah rocket killed eight workers in Haifa’s main railway depot. Doctors who treated the wounded told Human Rights Watch that the rockets contained metal ball bearings. The ball bearings have increased the number and seriousness of injuries from rocket fire, the doctors said.

“In my medical opinion, they [these rockets] are supposed to injure as many people as

possible,” said Dr. Eran Tal-Or, director of the Surgical Emergency Room at Haifa's Ramban Hospital. “If you wanted to bring down a building, you would make a weapon with a heavier blast. And you wouldn't bother with the balls inside that don't do much harm to buildings; just to people.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed three railway workers at the hospital wounded by the ball bearings in Sunday's lethal blast.

“There were three loud booms and I started running out of the depot,” said Alek Vensbaum, 61, a worker at the Israel Train Authority. “One of the guys, Nissim, who was later killed, yelled at everyone to run to the shelter. The fourth boom got me when I was nearly at the door, and I was hit by shrapnel ... I was hit by ball bearing-like pieces of metal in my neck, hand, stomach and foot.”

Sami Raz, 39, a railway electrician, said a ball bearing pierced his lung and lodged near his heart. “I had terrible difficulty breathing after I was hit,” he said.

Twelve people were wounded in the attack, four of them seriously.

Under international humanitarian law, parties to an armed conflict may not use weapons in civilian areas that are so inaccurate that they cannot be directed at military targets without imposing a substantial risk of civilian harm. Such attacks can constitute war crimes. Deliberately attacking civilians is in all circumstances prohibited and a war crime.

Human Rights Watch has [called](#) on both Hezbollah and the Israeli military to respect the absolute prohibition against targeting civilians or conducting indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas.

Since fighting began on July 12, Israeli attacks have reportedly killed 209 people in Lebanon, most of them civilians. On Monday, Human Rights Watch [called](#) on the Israeli government to provide details about a bombing on July 15 that killed 16 civilians in a convoy near the village of Marwahin.

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