

4 Hezbollah Members to Be Tried in Lebanon Killing
By Bassem Mroue, The Associated Press
1 February 2012

The special court investigating the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri said Wednesday it will try four Hezbollah members indicted in the case in absentia.

The Netherlands-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon did not say when the trial will start.

Hariri was killed along with 22 others by a suicide truck bomb on Feb. 14, 2005, in one of the most dramatic political assassinations in the Middle East. A billionaire businessman, he was at the time Lebanon's most prominent politician.

Hezbollah strongly denies the accusations and considers the court a Western tool to strike at the militant group.

The suspects were indicted last year, but Hezbollah has refused to arrest them and send them for trial at the U.N.-backed tribunal.

The STL said in a statement the Trial Chamber examined documents from the tribunal's prosecutor and the Lebanese Prosecutor-General. They detail the steps taken by the Lebanese authorities to apprehend the accused.

The STL's statement said the efforts included multiple attempts by the Lebanese authorities to find the accused at their last known residences, places of employment, family homes and other locations.

"The Trial Chamber concluded that all reasonable steps have been taken to secure the appearance of the accused and to notify them of the charges against them," the statement said.

The four suspects include Mustafa Badreddine, a Hezbollah commander who is also the suspected bomb maker for the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241 Americans.

The other suspects are Salim Ayyash, also known as Abu Salim; Assad Sabra and Hassan Oneissi, who changed his name to Hassan Issa.

The U.N. investigation into the killing of Hariri and the degree to which the Lebanese authorities should cooperate with it has become one of the most divisive issues in Lebanese politics in recent years.

In November, Hezbollah and its allies, who hold a majority in the Cabinet, were expected to block the funding for the court during a vote, but Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he already had secured Lebanon's \$36 million share of funding.

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