



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN LATEST MIDEAST CRISIS

19 July 2006

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour today expressed grave concern over the continued killing and maiming of civilians in Lebanon, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and called for accountability for any breaches of international law.

The High Commissioner recalled that parties to a conflict have the obligation to exercise precaution and respect the principle of proportionality in all military operations so as to prevent unnecessary suffering among the civilian population. "Indiscriminate shelling of cities constitutes a foreseeable and unacceptable targeting of civilians", she said. "Similarly, the bombardment of sites with alleged military significance, but resulting invariably in the killing of innocent civilians, is unjustifiable".

"International humanitarian law is clear on the supreme obligation to protect civilians during hostilities", the High Commissioner said. "This obligation is also expressed in international criminal law, which defines war crimes and crimes against humanity".

"International law demands accountability. The scale of the killings in the region, and their predictability, could engage the personal criminal responsibility of those involved, particularly those in a position of command and control".

The High Commissioner also warned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, in particular in southern Lebanon, where the population is reported to be increasingly deprived of access to basic services due to the violence.

"The situation in the south of Lebanon is alarming", she said. "A large and steadily increasing number of persons have been forcibly displaced. The most basic human rights of the population are at risk or are being violated, including their rights to life, health and food". The unrestricted and secure passage of all humanitarian assistance, including rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian workers should be ensured as a matter of priority, she said.