



# LEBANON

aggression and resistance



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## AGGRESSION AND RESISTANCE

Final Report of the International Civil Society and  
Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon

A publication of  
FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH  
October 2006

FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH is a research and advocacy center based in Bangkok, Thailand and with offices in Manila, Philippines and Mumbai, India.

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ISBN:

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# Lebanon: Aggression and Resistance

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Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon

September 10, 2006

**At the height of the Israeli bombardment of** Lebanon, a call came from civil society groups in that country asking the international community to send peace delegations to bear witness to the ongoing destruction of a nation and demonstrate solidarity with the Lebanese people in their hour of need.

Having worked with many of these groups to hold an international peace conference in Beirut in 2004, Focus on the Global South took the initiative in putting together such a delegation. It took about ten days to assemble the delegation. By the end of the first week of August, a 12-person Civil Society -Parliamentary Peace Mission was ready to

go. Members of the mission came from a diverse spectrum, both in terms of background and geographically. The mission included two farmers, one labor leader, two members of parliament, one journalist, two university professors, and three civil society activists. They came from India, the Philippines, Norway, France, Brazil, and Spain. Everyone was self-funded.

The members of the mission were:

Seema Mustafa, Resident Editor, Asian Age

Mujiv Hataman, Member of Parliament, Anak Mindanao, Philippines

Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South,  
Philippines

Kjeld Jakobsen, CUT (Central Union Federation),  
Brazil and Hemispheric Social Alliance

Gerard Durand, Confederation Paysanne,  
France, La Via Campesina

Kari Kobberød Brustad, Norsk Bonde -Og  
Smabrukarlag, Norway, La Via Campesina

Mohammed Salim, Member of Parliament,  
Communist Party of India (Marxist), India

Herbert Docena, Focus on the Global South,  
Philippines

Feroze Mithiborwala, Forum Against War and  
Terror, Mumbai

Kamal Chenoy, All India Peace and Solidarity  
Organisation, Coalition for Nuclear Disarma-  
ment and Peace (CNDP), India

Vijaya Chauhan, Rashtra Seva Dal, India  
(Youth Organization)

German Guillot, interpreter (French/Spanish/  
English/Arabic)

Their tasks were straightforward:

- to witness and document the war crimes and  
abuses being perpetrated on the Lebanese  
people;
- to show solidarity with the Lebanese;
- to discuss and work out ways in which the  
international community could assist in coun-  
tering the Israeli aggression and reconstruc-  
tion;
- to investigate the plight of migrant workers  
caught up in the war.

On August 12, the mission entered Northern  
Lebanon at the Dabboussiyeh Crossing with Syria.  
In the next few days, they witnessed the destruc-  
tion caused by Israeli airstrikes in Northern Leba-  
non, met with a broad range of political groups  
and civil society organizations, toured bombed  
out areas of South Beirut that were still being  
subjected to Israeli air and naval strikes, visited  
the wounded at Beirut University General Hospi-  
tal, talked to refugees from South Lebanon, met  
with Lebanese parliamentarians and President  
Emile Lahoud, and observed the first two days of  
the ceasefire.

The mission members announced their key  
findings and recommendations at a press confer-  
ence in Beirut on August 14, where they read a  
statement that was collectively drafted, fully dis-  
cussed, and unanimously approved by everyone.

The mission left Lebanon on August 15.

### ***A War against Civilians***

The wounds of war were evident shortly after we  
crossed the Syria-Lebanon border at 11.30 a.m.  
on August 12, 2006. At Haisa, about three kilo-  
metres from the Dabboussiyeh border crossing  
we came across the ruins of a bridge hit by Is-  
raeli war planes just the day before. Villagers told  
us that 12 persons were killed and 10 wounded,  
all civilians.

Twenty minutes later, at a place called Abu  
Shamra, we came across the remains of a gaso-  
line station and another bridge, the targets of an  
Israeli air strike just eight hours earlier. At three  
other places, Matfoun, Halat and very close to  
the famous Casino du Liban near Junieh, we had  
to take detours around bridges and vehicles de-  
stroyed by Israeli attacks. These are locations  
right to the very north of Lebanon where the  
Hezbollah---the Lebanese resistance movement  
that Israel claimed to be fighting---has marginal  
presence. The fresh instances of destruction  
brought home to us one of the key features of  
the Israeli offensive: its deliberate targeting of  
non military infrastructure to raise the costs of  
the war for the civilian population.

This was the pattern through out Lebanon. The main Syria-Beirut highway had been complete destroyed by Israeli fighter planes. Bridges linking roads and highways had been bombed out of operation. Gas stations were targeted and destroyed with Lebanon being left with little fuel. At the Syria-north Lebanon border, refugees were fleeing, terrified and apprehensive about their future in the war torn country. "They are fighting us, not the military," a young woman with four children pointed out quietly.

In Beirut the suburbs in the south populated mainly by Shias were almost completely destroyed. For 32 days Israeli planes bombed these areas continuously. The hotels, parks, schools in central Beirut have been turned into refugee camps for the one million displaced persons from south Beirut and south Lebanon.

The hotels, parks, schools in central Beirut have been turned into refugee camps for the one million displaced persons from south Beirut and south Lebanon. Villages in the south had been destroyed beyond recognition with the refugees in Beirut speaking of the death of relatives, the destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure including roads, power stations, bridges and

schools. It is clear that the Israelis have been targeting the civilians who returned to their vil-lages after the 32 day war as "die-hard Hezbollah supporters." Mohammad who had little to do with the Hezbollah but drove a taxi in Beirut said his eldest "will join the resistance, of course."

The sound of massive blasts punctuated the hours of every single day. The Israelis stepped up the bombing in the hours preceding the cessation of hostilities. Two hours after our visit to the Haret Hreik neighborhood in south Beirut on August 13, Israeli bombs hit the area, and we learned later that they wiped out seven families who had returned to the rubble that was once their homes in an effort to salvage some of their belongings. We were really lucky to have left the area before the bombs fell. In south Lebanon pitched battles were reported between the Hezbollah and the Israelis who suffered heavy military casualties as well. A day before the cessation of hostilities Hezbollah leaders in-formed us that 24 Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles had been destroyed by their fighters in the south of Lebanon. At 617 am on August 14, less than two hours before the ceasefire would take effect, we were awakened by Israeli war-planes bombing south Beirut yet again.



The cessation of hostilities was met with silence in Beirut. It was only 12 hours later, just after 8 pm at night, that people rushed to the television sets to hear Hezbollah leader Nasrallah speak. He appeared on al Manar television, a television channel dedicated to Hezbollah activities and trusted by him and his men. The seven storey building that housed the television channel in south Beirut had been amongst the first buildings to be bombed by Israel. Nasrallah announced 'jihad al binnah' (the jihad of reconstruction) and asked the people to return to their homes. He said that the Hezbollah cadres would be out to join them in the reconstruction process from 8 a.m. the next morning, and those who had suffered would be paid compensation. His words had an electrifying effect, and within hours the refugees in Beirut had climbed into their cars, vans, buses to begin the journey through the rubble that was once the highway, to their homes. The roads were jammed, with cars taking two hours to travel as little as ten kilometres.

At 8 am sharp on April 15, the reconstruction started. In Beirut we saw the Hezbollah cadres with guns, bull dozers and fire extinguishers as they joined the civilians to clear the rubble and begin the long and hard task of bringing some semblance of normalcy to their lives. They all agreed that it would take months, if not years, but the thought did not deter the hundreds of men and women who came out on the streets to participate in the reconstruction. Within hours the Hezbollah cadres started handing out money to the victims to rent accommodations until their houses were rebuilt, and to rebuild their destroyed homes.

In all this time there was little sign of the Lebanese government that had kept out of the war, and was not visible while we were in Beirut in the reconstruction and rehabilitation work. Subsequent reports from Lebanon confirmed that the Hezbollah had stolen a decided march over the government in Lebanon with the civilians turning to the resistance group not just in war, but in peace as well. This was not surprising, given the weakness of the Lebanese state, a condition that was attributed by President Emile

Lahoud partly to Washington's massive support for Israel.

### ***The Reasons for the War and its Political Consequences***

The 34 day Israel- Lebanon War was supposedly sparked off by the 'kidnapping' of two Israeli soldiers by the Hezbollah forces who crossed over the border to attack the Israeli troops. In the backdrop of earlier events in this area, this explanation for the massive Israeli attack that followed was not credible. Hezbollah, a powerful military and political force had through its guerrilla attacks forced Israel out of almost all of South Lebanon in 2000. But Israel refused to vacate a 30 square kilometer area around the Shebaa Farms. Thus skirmishes between the Hezbollah and Israeli forces continued. As a Pentagon consultant told investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, prior to most recent incident, "there had...been cross border incidents involving Israel and Hezbollah, in both directions, for some time." [Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon," *New Yorker*, August 21, 2006, pp. 29-30]. Some of these skirmishes involved captures of combatants for prisoner exchange purposes. Thus, the unleashing of a full fledged land, air and sea assault by the Israelis within days of the Hezbollah's capture of the two soldiers indicated a pre-planned attack motivated not by the release of its POWs but by the strategic goal of destroying Hezbollah. A central part of the strategy was to teach the Lebanese not to support or tolerate the Hezbollah by attacking the country's infrastructure. This was, in the very real sense of the word, a Roman-style "exemplary war" designed to teach the Hezbollah, Lebanon, and the whole Arab world a lesson.

The misrepresentation of the Hezbollah action is in keeping with the Western stand on West Asia, and Israeli occupation and aggression in particular. From 1948 onwards despite the history of Zionist terrorism and the murder of the UN negotiator Count Bernadotte along with others in the Zionist terror group Irgun during the bombing of the King David hotel, the West has generally turned a blind eye to Israeli state ter-

rorism and violations of international law. This is shown by the West's ignoring of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 which mandate a sovereign Palestinian state with Israel going back to its pre-June 1967 borders. The West has also striven to maintain a regional balance of power favouring Israel. The US facilitated the Israeli nuclear programme and provided it delivery vehicles for its nuclear warheads, ignoring the revelations of nuclear whistleblower Mordecai Vanunu. It has also used Israel to punish Arab states that worked against US interests.

The second Israeli-Lebanese war was a consequence of this. The US and Israel saw the growth and consolidation of Hezbollah, which in turn was supported by Syria and Iran as a threat both to Israel and US plans to isolate and possibly overthrow the existing regimes in Iran and Syria. With the breakup of the Palestinian areas, which were physically separated with Israeli military posts in between, and no airport for independent communication with the outside world, the Palestinians in the Gaza strip and the West Bank were cut off from each other. The massive security wall, built despite the International Court of Justice's opinion, further divided Palestinian towns, and made the resumption of armed struggle from these isolated enclaves against the Israelis extremely difficult and hazardous. Thus in the absence of a Palestinian armed resistance, Hezbollah remained the only military force capable of facing the Israeli military force as it had repeatedly demonstrated from the mid-1980s onwards, and was along with the Amal militia a major ally of Syria and Iran. Thus the Israelis' targeting of the National Resistance led by Hezbollah that also came to include the Amal and the Lebanese Communist Party [LCP]. This formation was supported from outside by, among others, the leading Maronite Christian party led by General Michel Aoun.

The Israeli government's efforts to isolate the Hezbollah were backed by the Bush administration, which had been "agitating for some time to find a reason for a preemptive blow against Hezbollah," according to a Pentagon consultant inter-

viewed by Seymour Hersh. He added, 'It was our intent to have Hezbollah diminished, and now we have someone else doing it.' [Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon," *New Yorker*, August 21, 2006, pp. 29-30] Destruction of the Hezbollah was perhaps even more vital for the United States than Israel, claims Henry Barkey, chairman of Lehigh University's International Relations Department and a former member of the US State Department's policy planning staff. In a recent article, Barkey claims that while Israel can live with a Hezbollah driven north of the Litani River, the US would not. The key reason has to do with the "Hizbullah model." According to Barkey, "it represents the nightmarish metamorphosis of a well supplied and trained militia. If it can work in Lebanon, the model can be emulated elsewhere around the world -- Hizbullah is far more sophisticated and entrenched than Al Qaeda. It is impossible to defeat it without inflicting civilian casualties. Therein lies Hizbullah's strength: it calculates that the outside world will relent in the face of civilian casualties." [Daily Star (Beirut), August 13, 2006, p. 1]

The socio-political basis of the Resistance includes not just the Hezbollah or the Shia community but is supported by the communists and the dominant Maronites. This makes a mockery of the claim that the Hezbollah is a terrorist organization, even though it has two ministers in the Lebanese government, along with Amal and the Maronites who are also represented by President Emile Lahoud. The fact that 12 communists died in the 34 day war starkly demonstrates that this alliance was firm and secular, exposing the lie that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. The process of listing of terrorist organizations by the West is known to be politically partisan, and the targeting of Hezbollah is no exception.

Though France, Russia and China wanted a quick cessation of the war, the US with its veto power resisted adamantly. It obviously thought Israel would prevail, facilitating its attempt at regime change in Iran and Syria. The notorious statement by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, at the height of the war, that the region

was witnessing the "birth pangs of a new Middle East," revealed clearly what the US intentions were and what the war was about. The two Israeli POWs, for which the Resistance wanted a prisoner exchange for three Lebanese prisoners, was just a pretext. The US envisaged a new Middle East where all regimes would be like the pro-US troika of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, which would accept the regional hegemony of Israel and would not develop nuclear power to the extent that it might create the scientific basis of future nuclear weaponisation. The proposed "lesson" to Hezbollah and Lebanon, which was also meant also for Iran and Syria, was to be an object lesson in US-Israeli hegemony, where policies ranging from virtual denial of Palestinian rights through silence or lack of demonstrative action, to unrestrained neo-liberal economic reforms as mandated by the US and the IMF-World Bank-WTO troika were to be mandatory. This is the US neo-conservative vision as enunciated by Condoleeza Rice.

The pro-US Arab troika played ball during the first part of the war. But as the Lebanese Resistance led by Hezbollah continued to fight fiercely, not succumbing to superior Israeli firepower and the relentless air pounding by the unchallenged Israeli air force, the Arab street rose in support of the Resistance. This forced the Arab governments to recognize the likely Resistance victory and change tack. The Saudi Grand Mufti who had issued a fatwa against Hezbollah was forced to retract. The Egyptians also praised the resistance and called for an end to the war. Prominent Jordanian and Kuwaiti intellectuals praised the Hezbollah and argued that there was 'no longer an invincible army, an immune state,' a clear refutation of the long standing theory of Israeli invincibility.

Nullification of the victory of the National Resistance led by Hezbollah was one of the key objectives of the US-supported United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. It targeted Hezbollah as the aggressor, called for its disarmament and an additional 15,000 man UN force to supplement the 15,000 Lebanese troops to

patrol the Israeli-Lebanon border. There were no strictures against the Israelis who had willfully killed 4 UN peacekeepers and injured another, an Indian. There was not even a formal ceasefire, only a 'cessation of hostilities.' The right of the Israelis to "self defence" was also recognized which led to an Israeli commando attack a few days later, in clear violation of the UN resolution.

Major changes have occurred in the Arab street, which have hailed the Resistance victory as unprecedented and smashing the aura of US-Israeli invincibility. Posters and banners of Hassan Nasrallah and the Hezbollah sprung up throughout the Arab world. Posters showing Nasrallah with the local leader [like President Bashar Assad in Syria] and other leaders like the martyred Sheik Yassin [of Hamas] mushroomed. Citizens in Damascus whom we met on 16-17 August, were ecstatic over the Hezbollah victory. On 16th August, President Assad made a strong speech calling upon pro-US Arab states to rethink their strategy, and for the Arab street to rise and force their leaders to change their policies to nationalist, pro-Palestinian ones following the Resistance.

After the 14th August stopping of hostilities, there was much criticism in Israel of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defence Minister Amir Peretz, and the Chief of the Israeli Defence Forces [IDF] Dan Halutz. Public approval ratings of Olmert fell to 40% and of Peretz to 28%. Halutz was publicly derided for selling off his shares just the day before the war broke out. The IDF's military tactics, including its over-reliance on air power were widely debated. As the extent of the military defeat sinks in, there may be further upheavals in Israeli politics.

The 34 day Israeli-Lebanese war that started on 12 July, had results and repercussions that Israel, the US and its allies including those in West Asia were completely taken unawares by. It was a monumental setback. As the Israeli Foreign Minister conceded, no force could disarm Hezbollah. The Arab street is at fever pitch, and US-Israeli action against Iran and Syria would

lead to popular pressure on Arab governments not to back the US and its allies. The 34 days of resolute struggle by the Lebanese Resistance and its victory against the much feared military Israeli machine may well prove a harbinger or profound political changes in the region in days to come. It may, as Arabs earlier skeptical of the Resistance have now predicted, lead to a 'new Middle East,' one completely different to that predicted by Condoleeza Rice--being instead one that is nationalist, self-reliant and assertive of Arab and Palestinian rights.

One worrisome outcome of this war could be a change in Israeli military strategy. With its conventional warfare capability now nullified by popularly supported resistance guerrilla resistance movements like Hezbollah, Israel may now be tempted to threaten to resort to the use of battlefield nuclear explosives, if not mega-nuclear weapons, in future wars to dissuade Arab attempts to support the Palestinian struggle and rectify territorial injustices. Threat can easily result in force. It is well known that Israel has

nuclear weapons. Being the only government with nuclear weapons in the Middle East, it is Israel, not Iran, that is the area's nuclear destabilizer.

***Migrant Workers: the other Victims***

Among the victims of the war were not only the Lebanese people but also migrant workers in Lebanon. One of the workers we interviewed, Miramar Flores, a Filipina, exemplified the plight of the this work force. Miramar Flores was confined to a hospital with broken bones after she jumped from her employer's second floor balcony in an effort to escape Israeli bombs after her employer locked her in. As she tried to make up her mind whether to stay on under the Israeli bombardment or to flee, it may well have occurred to her that it was a choice between death and death. She chose to jump. A great number Filipino workers in Lebanon are treated like slaves. In 2004 six Filipinos working in Lebanese households died under "mysterious" circumstances. In 2000, the last year when a database was compiled by the Lebanese Pastoral Committee for Afro-Asian Migrant workers, there were over 400 reported cases of physical and sexual



abuse of migrant workers, half of the victims being Filipinos. Helen Dabu who is with the Kanlungan Center Foundation, an organisation that has been dealing directly with victims of abuse from Lebanon and elsewhere, said most complaints of this kind are received from West Asia. The cases outnumber those reported from Hong Kong, Singapore or Malaysia where the complaints most often involve contract violations rather than rape or maltreatment. Dabu's assessment was supported by Philippine labor attache Ma. Glenda Manalo who said that this view was shared by many other diplomats working in the region.

One disconcerting finding of the mission was that whereas workers signed contracts in the Philippines stipulating a monthly pay of US\$200 a month, most of those we interviewed were actually receiving only US\$150 from their employers. It is suspected that employment agencies in Lebanon and the Philippines, in collusion with some Philippine government agencies, are profiting immensely from this systematic violation of contract.

Lebanon is the tenth top destination of Filipino workers abroad. Philippine ambassador to Leba-

non Francis Bichara said that the exact figure was difficult to assess because many were smuggled in but research done by the organization Kanlungan indicated that the figure could be as high as 50,000. Filipino workers started going to Lebanon since 1978 but the numbers have increased, with the last year registering the entry of as many as 14,000 workers. Many Filipinas fled Lebanon to escape the war. Ironically, however, the war gave others the excuse to free themselves from their abusive masters with many interviewed by the delegation recounting horrific stories of abuse, low pay and inhuman living conditions. We were told that similar conditions afflicted Sri Lankan domestic workers, who are said to be less vocal in resisting abuse than Filipinas.

It must be pointed out, however, that not all Lebanese employers abuse migrant workers. There are said to be many decent employers. The Hezbollah, who are part of the government, are said to be the most sympathetic to the plight of the migrant workers. This would not be surprising since few in the lower-class Shiite community that is the base of the Hezbollah can afford foreign domestic help. ■



# Annex 1

## Statement and Recommendations

*The following statement and recommendations were collectively drafted, fully discussed, and unanimously approved by all members of the delegation and read at a press conference in Beirut on August 14, 2006.*

**We, the members of the international** peace delegation comprising India, Philippines, Brazil, Norway, France, and Spain express our solidarity with the people of Lebanon in their resistance to Israeli aggression.

The victory of the Lebanese resistance over Israel has inspired the peoples of the world who see in this a reassertion of people's power. The resistance has for the first time broken the myth of Israeli invincibility, its supposed military and political superiority over the region. This victory is a defeat for the US-Israeli designs for a "New Middle East" that is another term for Zionist expansionism and US hegemony that are integral parts of the global imperialist project.

The courageous Lebanese National Resistance led by the Hizbollah and its secretary general Hasan Nasrallah has led to this historic victory. The unity of the Lebanese people across religions and classes, and the resistance of the civil society have also been central to the victory over Israel and the United States.

We join Lebanon in mourning the death of all innocent civilians. We condemn the Israeli policy of widespread targeted killing of civilians as an instrument of state terror. The Israeli attack on civilians is a grave violation of international laws

and should be treated as a war crime.

We also express sympathy with the plight of foreign migrant workers in Lebanon who have been displaced in this aggression. We demand that their governments give all necessary assistance. This is an important part of the large-scale displacement of one million Lebanese creating a major humanitarian crisis.

The Israeli policy of "collective punishment" has destroyed civilian infrastructure including residential complexes, entire villages in south Lebanon, bridges, roads, power stations, gas stations that will require billions of dollars to reconstruct. We call on the international community to help the people of Lebanon in this gigantic task of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

We welcome the ceasefire and call for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from South Lebanon. Israel must pay reparation for the victims of the aggression. We call upon the global peace movement, including the Israeli peace movement, to resist the Israeli-US aggression.

We condemn the partisan role of the international media that has been part of the US-Israeli disinformation strategy.

We recommend:

- the setting up of an international war crimes tribunal for the trial of Israeli policy-makers and the military for crimes against humanity; the international peace movement must facilitate this process;
- withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon including the Shebaa Farms;
- the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state;
- withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan heights;
- release of all prisoners in Israeli jails;
- end of US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan;
- end to all US and Israeli threats to Iran and Syria.

Mission members:

Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South, Philippines

Mohammed Salim, MP, Communist Party of

India (Marxist), India

Kjeld Jakobsen, CUT Brazil and Hemispheric Social Alliance, Brazil

Mujiv Hataman, MP, Anak Mindanao, Philippines

Seema Mustafa, Resident Editor, Asian Age, India

Kamal Chenoy, All India Peace and Solidarity Organization, Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament, India

Kari Kobberød Brustad, Norsk Bønde-Og Smakbrukarlag, Norway, La Via Campesina

Gerard Durand, Confederation Paysanne, France, La Via Campesina

Feroze Mithiborwala, Forum against War and Terror, Mumbai, India

Vijaya Chauhan, Rastra Seva Dal (Youth Organization), India

Herbert Docena, Focus on the Global South, Philippines

German Guillot, interpreter, Spain

## Annex 2

# Declaration of La Via Campesina

**La Via Campesina is an international** organisation working in defence of small farmers, fishermen and women, landless and agricultural workers. This movement includes over 130 organisations and represents tens of millions of farmers. It fights against the neo-liberal model of globalisation that places economic interests over and above social and environmental conditions.

La Via Campesina has participated with two delegates\* in an international mission of solidarity with the people of Lebanon. The mission was organised in response to appeals from several Lebanese organisations. Twelve representatives of social movements, unions, human rights organisations and unions as well as members of parliament are part of this mission.

La Via Campesina was in Lebanon to meet the social movements, to visit the area, to witness and to make known the terrible consequences of this war for the population. We also want to give our direct support to the organisations of civil society which are confronted with the destruction of their country and the dramatic effects for the population. La Via Campesina is especially concerned about the consequences for peasants and agricultural workers in the South of the Lebanon who are heavily hit by this conflict.

The delegation has met different political parties that support the resistance in Lebanon as well as Hizbullah. Other meetings have taken place with Lebanese social movements (anti-war movements,

environmental organisations), the president of the Republic M. Emile Lahoud and representatives of the External Affairs Committee of the Lebanese Parliament and members of the group led by Nabil Berri, president of the Parliament.

The delegation has visited the heavily bombed suburbs of South Beirut. Two hours after the departure of the mission other bombings took place. The delegation met wounded in a hospital as well as displaced persons that had sought refuge in a school.

Part of the La Via Campesina delegation made use of the cease-fire to go to Saida, about 40 km South of Beirut in order to meet peasants of the Organisation of Lebanese Farm Workers.

All the political forces and organisations that we have met have insisted on the fact that the Israeli aggression had nothing to do with the kidnapping of the two soldiers by Hizbullah but was planned already months before by the United States and its ally in the region, Israel, who only needed a pretext for their aggression.

We were able to observe that the vast majority of the Lebanese population supports the armed resistance, mainly by Hizbullah but also by other groups. The civil population also resists actively through its unity in times of crisis - thereby resisting one of the objectives of this aggression aimed at the fragmentation of Lebanese society. Its resistance is also shown through the will to

make a joint front against the chaos caused by the war, through mobilisation of solidarity helping the million of displaced persons and through preventive actions that have avoided an even bigger humanitarian catastrophe for the whole of the country.

In Lebanon there is only one general peasant union, non confessional and independent of political parties. This is the Union of Lebanese Farm Workers that have explained to us that the South of Lebanon has been devastated by the bombings. As much as 70% of the animal and vegetal production has been destroyed (sheep, goats, cows, bananas, coffee, tobacco etc.) as well as numerous houses if not entire villages.

La Via Campesina not only defends the right to justice, equality and solidarity for farmers, but for all people. That is why during the big international gatherings such as the World Social Forum and other spaces of struggle (such as mobilisations against G8, WTO, World Bank and IMF) and in its efforts to build alliances, La Via Campesina works with the international social movement to form a front of resistance to neo-liberal ideology and to promote alternative policies. When people are

assaulted economically or militarily, as in the case of the Lebanese, we must respond with solidarity and a call for resistance.

Together with others of the social movement, La Via Campesina denounces the aggression against the civilian population and demands an immediate halt of the war, the retreat of Israeli forces from Lebanon, and the placement of an international peacekeeping force under the direction of the United Nations.

All hostilities must stop in order to facilitate a solution by the way of negotiation which recognizes the rights and the needs of all people touched by this conflict. We can never accept a military way as a solution to the conflict. A return to the negotiating table for an overall agreement is the only solution.

All people have the right to live in peace with the full recognition of their fundamental rights.

Gerard Durand of the Confederation Paysanne - France and Kari Kobberøed Brustad of NBS (Norwegian Small Holders Union) - Norway

# Nasrallah: New Arab World Hero

Seema Mustafa

**DAMASCUS, 11 August, 2006: "Nasser in 1956, Nasrallah in 2006"** -- the Arab street has found a new hero, a figure that it has been looking for to act as a catalyst to unite the Arab world and infuse it with an agenda and a common mission. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the charismatic leader of the Hezbollah, has clearly occupied this position and has been embraced by the peoples of West Asia as the "hero".

Huge posters of the Hezbollah leader stare down from the streets with many of course giving him a backdrop of far more sophisticated weapons than the organisation possesses. It is exactly a month since Nasrallah and his men, with little more than grit and determination to sustain them, have held off the Israelis, with shopkeepers and the common man, glued to the radio and to Al Jazeera, greeting each successful strike with cheers and applause. The taxi driver, with not even a smattering of English, was able to communicate that Nasrallah is the new leader of the Arab masses, a position he has been given for standing up to the military might of Israel and the US.

The newspapers in Kuwait, and in Syria, are full of little else but the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, with the tone and tenor of the news suggesting that the Arab street is no longer willing to tolerate governments that do not extend full support for the people of Lebanon and the Hezbollah leader. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, seen as the leader of one of the regimes close to the US, had to bow to street pressure and send his own brother, who is also the

minister for labour, with a large delegation to Beirut to express support for Nasrallah and his fighters. Saudi Arabia, which had first been critical of Hezbollah, changed its tune to support the organisation and demand an immediate ceasefire.

Media reports are now all pointing towards the fact that Israel has lost the diplomatic war, and is set to even lose the military war if it is not careful. The reports suggest that the Hezbollah has lost fewer fighters with the real casualty being the civilians in Lebanon with all newspapers carrying absolutely horrifying pictures of death and destruction. Israel, on the other hand, the reports point out, has lost more soldiers and fewer civilians in what is a clear indication that the Hezbollah is fighting a war against the military while Israel is targeting innocent civilians. In the war for Bint Jbeil, it was the Israelis who pulled back as nine of their soldiers were killed. There are news reports that Israel has had to vacate a town on its side, which, the newspapers here point out, has been the first time ever in its history.

Significantly, the one-month war, which is already being hailed as a "victory" by the Arab street for the Hezbollah, has defeated US plans for West Asia in two crucial areas. One, Nasrallah, who is described by officials here as a "secular" leader, has completely overtaken Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden as the real hero in the Arab street. There is not a person in Damascus who is not full of praise for the Hezbollah leader with the people turning to Nasrallah as the new Nasser. He has a

vision for unity and he is the man the Arabs are openly saying they would like to be in the lead.

Second, and this is probably the most significant consequence of this war, the Shia-Sunni divide that the Americans and the West had been projecting has been bridged because of the Hezbollah. Nasrallah's popularity cuts across both groups, with the Arab street unitedly rallying behind the Hezbollah leader. Hamas, which did not have particularly good relations with the Hezbollah in the past, has come out in open support. "Fight on, Hezbollah" is the new song of the Hamas fighters, according to local newspapers. Lebanon's Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has extended support to Hezbollah. Sunni groups are coming out in open support as are governments. Turkey, for instance, has snapped off military ties with Israel and is refusing to purchase more weapons.

A third consequence of the war, which can have major strategic repercussions, is that for the first time in decades, Israel's military might has been "exposed". The excitement really centres around the realisation that Israel is not invincible, and an army of tough soldiers armed with little more than

not very sophisticated rockets, can keep both Israel and the US at bay. This is being pointed out by columnists in the Arab newspapers, which have reported at length the skillful tactics adopted by the Hezbollah and its ability to strategise the war. Nasrallah has overtaken the heads of governments here, with his smiling face clearly more popular than the despots who rule many of the nations in this part of the world.

US and Israel are seen here as one entity with a major English news daily carrying a photograph of an Israeli soldier sporting a US stars and stripes bandanna. US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice's recent remarks during a visit to Israel, where she said that the world was witnessing the birth pangs of a new Middle East, led a Lebanese newspaper to brand her as the "midwife from hell". The anger is palpable, and for the first time in years the Arab street is talking at the top of its voice. This was not so in 1982, when all were divided, but it is so today with the unity in itself a formidable event for the propped up governments and the West, which has still not unequivocally called for a ceasefire and a pullout of Israeli forces from Lebanon. ■

*This article was first published in Asian Age (<http://www.asianage.com>)*

# Unbroken Spirits Fill Highways of Death

Seema Mustafa

**BEIRUT, 12 August 2006 - Lebanon is a** country that has clearly not lost its spirit, but is worried, unhappy, and, as no one hesitates to tell you, "very very angry". The eight-hour drive from Damascus to Beirut, through a circuitous route taking us all the way along the coastline to the north Daebouissie checkpoint to enter north Lebanon, is dotted with signs of devastation, fleeing refugees and a nation that has not lost its resilience and has united behind Hezbollah and its charismatic 48-year-old leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

Families with little children are queued up in battered cars in the heat, waiting for their papers to be cleared for entry into Syria. A young mother of four little children said her house was not bombed. "We did not want to leave but have to because our children are so frightened when the Israeli planes come," she said. A father sitting with two bright young sons speaking perfect English is leaving his home in north Lebanon to go to Damascus. For how long? He shrugs, "Who knows,

but we will come back." His sons are somber but resigned that their studies will be interrupted as now the war has spread into the north as well and the schools have been closed. Little children from the refugee families are begging for food and some are offering to shine shoes in return for much needed money.

Three kilometers from the border and the signs of Israeli aggression begin to appear. Just four hours before we passed by, the Israeli planes attacked a bridge and destroyed it. This seems to be the pattern throughout as all bridges along the route have been hit with the Lebanese now using side roads to travel. The main Syria-Beirut highway is unusable as it has been completely bombed with no side roads for the travellers to use. At Haissa, in a bombing just 24 hours old, 12 persons were killed and 10 badly wounded in an Israeli air raid. Five days ago, a Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli was the target with a police post being attacked by Israeli war planes in which eight Lebanese policemen were killed. A little further

down we come across yet another bridge destroyed six days ago; there were casualties although no one was around to give us the figures. A burnt car was mute testimony to the fact that persons had died in this attack as well.

Not a single bridge was left intact with the air raids over the past week destroying this very valuable infrastructure in north Lebanon, which is officially not being targeted by the Israelis.

The other visible target in the area was petrol pumps. Lebanon is without fuel now, with one huge petrol pump lying devastated at Abi Shamra along with a bridge and the electricity poles in the vicinity. This attack took place on Saturday morning as well. Lebanese citizens have climbed the poles and are trying to restore electricity while others point to the devastation and voice their anger. It was clear within 10 km into Lebanon that the Israeli targets were not military in nature with all efforts on to destroy the infrastructure, stop the supplies of gas, food and essential commodities as the trucks cannot use the narrow side roads, and to make life impossible for the Lebanese civilians. "They are fighting us, not the military, our Hezbollah is fighting their military, not their civilians," a Lebanese pointed out quietly.

The UN Security Council might have approved of a resolution, but there has been no let-up in the Israeli offensive here, in north or south Lebanon. The bombing continues with the hotels in Beirut, the market places and the squares full of displaced persons from the south. The little hotel where we are staying is crowded with the displaced Lebanese whose women have tears in their eyes, whose men can barely speak without emotion overtaking them as most of them have had their homes destroyed and their relatives killed. A lovely woman sitting by and smoking the traditional hookah in the lobby says, as if she were discussing the weather: "My home is completely gone, we don't think this is going to stop. We are here now, tomorrow even this hotel might not be safe."

There is fear in the eyes of her little girl, who had just given her exams for the final year in school but does not know what is going to happen to her and her family now. They are from Tyre.

White phosphorus bombs are being used by Israel, but so far there is no trace of uranium-tipped bombs. Two-ton bombs have been used in the neighbourhood. Civilian localities have been virtually destroyed in south Beirut and the suburbs. This sparkling city is a ghost town with a leading social activist here pointing out: "It is a very high intensity war." The shops have their shutters down and only the signs speak of a Beirut that is famous all across the world for its night life. Casinos, beautiful luxury resorts along the coastline and stylish beauty salons speak of another world, but all that one sees now are tense-looking people rushing about in the day hours trying to get some fuel, food and complete their business before the Israeli fighter planes come swooping down again.

The Lebanese in Beirut have started getting telephone calls on their mobiles. It is a psychological warfare method that Israel has perfected. The caller says words to this effect: "This is the Israeli Army. If you are very close to the Hezbollah we advise you not to remain in touch. We are going to smash them and we do not want to hurt you." The intent is to create fear, but the Lebanese who spoke of this to us said, "We are all laughing, it is so juvenile and so very stupid." Incidentally, this report is being filed after the UN Security Council resolution that has brought no relief at all to the region. No one here in Beirut expects much from it, and while there might be some hope, there is also a clear resolve to follow "the Hezbollah and whatever decision it takes". The Hezbollah has made it clear that it expects the Lebanese government to take the right decision "in the interests of the nation" and it will abide by it. For the people living under terror, this is semantics; for them the war will end only after, as they all say to the last child, "Israel vacates our land and we can go home." ■

*This article was first published in Asian Age (<http://www.asianage.com>)*



# Tracing a Trail of Destruction

Walden Bello

**BEIRUT, 13 August 2006: The wounds of war** were evident shortly after we crossed the Syria-Lebanon border at 1130 in the morning on August 12. At Haissa, about three kilometers from the Dabboussiyeh border crossing, we come across the ruins of a bridge hit by Israeli war planes just the day before. Villagers tell us 12 people were killed and 10 wounded, all civilians.

## ***An anti-civilian war?***

Twenty minutes later, at a place called Abu Shamra, we come across the remains of a gasoline station and bridge, the targets of an Israeli airstrike just eight hours earlier. "Now, what was the military logic behind that?" asks Seema Mustafa, an Indian journalist with our international peace delegation of 12 people. It is a question shared by the Lebanese who tell us what happened.

At three other places, Matfoun, Halat, and near the famous Casino du Lebanon at Jumieh, we have to take detours around bridges and vehicles destroyed by Israeli attacks. These are sites very far from the front in Southern Lebanon, in a part of the country where Hezbollah, the movement Israel is fighting, has very little presence. These fresh instances of destruction bring home to us one of the key features of the Israeli offensive: it has deliberately targeted non-military infrastructure to raise the costs of the war for the civilian population.

With evidence of Israel's anti-civilian strategy

fresh in our minds, we are not surprised when we hear, after arriving in Beirut, about the strafing of a convoy of civilians leaving the town of Marieyoun in the South. On Friday, several hundred cars left the town, after negotiations between the Israelis and the non-belligerent Lebanese Army. As it snaked up North, it came under fire repeatedly from Israeli planes with at least six people killed and many others wounded. What was the reason for violating the agreement? The Israeli excuses ranged from "it was a mistake" to "suspicion that the convoy was carrying Hezbollah guerrillas." Nahla Chahal, one of the coordinators of international civil society delegations to Lebanon, tells us: "The deliberate attacks on civilians is a new element in Israel's redrafting of the rules of war. It's nothing less than a war crime."

Herbert Docena, one of the members of our delegation who spent time in occupied Iraq, says, "What is different between Iraq and here is that in Iraq, the US does seem to have a modicum of concern about international public opinion. Here, the Israelis simply don't care about public opinion. So it's more dangerous."

## ***Israel and Hezbollah: contrasting strategies***

The delegation is told at a briefing on the evening of our arrival by our Lebanese hosts that the contrast between the war strategies of the Israelis and the Hezbollah is evident in the nature of the casualties: most of the more than 1000 Lebanese

killed by the Israeli armed forces are civilians, while most of the more than 100 Israelis who have died in the war so far are soldiers.

There is, in fact, a strong sense of pride in the Hezbollah's military performance that is evident as we are briefed that evening by representatives of several of Lebanon's political parties, including the right-wing Free Lebanon Movement led by General Aoun, the centrist "Third Force," the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Hezbollah itself. According to Dr Issam Naaman of the Third Force, the war has now lasted 31 days, more than any of the previous Arab-Israeli wars. "At this point, it is clear that Israel has lost the war on the ground and is trying to get at the diplomatic front, with the support of the United States, what it has lost on the military side."

#### ***A new Nasser?***

The destruction of some 34 Israeli Merkava tanks in Friday's fighting, the death of some 19 Israeli soldiers -- the highest so far in this month-long war -- and the downing of an Israeli helicopter are cited as proof not only of a victory by the Hezbollah,

whose resistance to Israel is, according to the polls, supported by some 87 per cent of the Lebanese people. Equally important for the Arabs, we realise during their briefing to us, is that the successful resistance of a few hundred well-motivated and well trained Hezbollah guerrillas has ended the era of Arab humiliation by Israel's military might.

"It's really quite interesting and exciting," comments Seema Mustafa, the Indian journalist, "the way the Arab Street has come behind Hassan Nasrallah." Indeed, the man one Hezbollah representative at the briefing fondly refers to as "our baby-faced" leader is achieving a status once reserved for Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian leader. This point was brought home to me by Taufik, the driver who ferried us from Damascus to Beirut, who said as he steered us through the detour around one of the bombed bridges earlier in the day, "I belong to no party except the one that can bring food to my family. But I really like this man Nasrallah. He has brought pride to all of us Lebanese." ■

# Truce Hopes Emerge in Fog of War

Seema Mustafa

**BEIRUT, 13 August 2006: The build-up to** the ceasefire, if it takes place at all in real terms, has been violent and bloody. Israel has redoubled its offensive against Lebanon with south Beirut coming in the line of fire again after a gap of a little over 24 hours. International journalists and peace activists were taken by Lebanese social groups at a pre-arranged time to the Beirut suburbs to witness the extent of destruction. Minutes after we left the Israeli planes arrived in the afternoon on Sunday and showered the same area with bombs, the explosions reverberating through the entire city. It was supposed to be a message, the Lebanese said: "Do not try to get back to normalcy, we are still here."

South Beirut has been razed to the ground by continuous bombing since 12 July with only a six-day respite in between. Entire streets have ceased to exist as this part of the capital represented the social base of the Hezbollah and was targeted over and over again. Hezbollah secretary-general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's residence has been decimated, as have been the offices of the organisation. Hospitals, maternity hospitals, clinics, commercial centres, and civilian residential blocks have holes through them with toys and household articles lying scattered on the streets, mute reminders of the fact that this was once the most bustling part of the capital of Lebanon.

The Hezbollah has spent the last 24 hours beating back a major Israeli offensive. The "resistance", as it is popularly referred to, is fighting an equal, if not superior war with inferior and highly inadequate weapons.

Twenty-seven Israeli tanks were destroyed in southern Lebanon by Hezbollah rockets, a fact that

was covered on the Al Jazeera and Al Arabia TV channels with pictures of tanks occupied by civilians who have still not moved out of the southern areas. There has apparently been little mention of this in the international media, although the Israeli airport spent Saturday night literally carpet bombing the areas where the tanks had been attacked and successfully crippled.

What has attracted considerable attention in Beirut has been the shooting down of an Israeli helicopter by the Hezbollah, a first since 12 July. It must be pointed out that the Hezbollah cadres, following Nasrallah's cue, believe in understatement and their political ideologue, Dr Ali Fayyad, had told us earlier that there were unconfirmed reports that a helicopter had been shot down. The reports, confirmed later at night, maintained that it had been shot down by a Hezbollah missile named "Waid", meaning "Promise". The street grapevine insisted that the Hezbollah has yet another missile capable of reaching Tel Aviv and that this one is called "Zilzila", meaning "Earthquake".

Israel has lost over 24 soldiers in the past one day, again a report that has been confirmed by official agencies here. Despite trying to push deep into Lebanese territory, the Israeli forces are meeting very stiff resistance with the result that they are unable to enter the villages even after virtually carpet bombing many of these into what they hoped would be complete submission. Hezbollah's guerrilla strategy has proved extremely effective with the strike and retreat formula making it very difficult for the Israelis to move into villages and retain them even as the forces push forward. As a young man named Qasim, who returned from Dubai to be with his family, said,

"They have not yet been able to reach the Litani river. Despite their power, our resistance has held them back." The costs to Israel militarily have been immense as, unlike 1982 when it could surround Beirut with no resistance whatsoever, it is finding it extremely difficult to counter the Hezbollah and the increasing losses have created a major rift within the Israeli government, and between the Israeli government and the Israeli Army.

The Hezbollah's Dr Fayyad gave a brilliant account, when asked by this reporter, about how Hezbollah had "won" the war. For there is not a Lebanese in the country, or an Arab citizen on the Arab street, who does not believe that the resistance has won and that Israel has been humbled, politically and militarily, for the first time since it came into existence. He said it was important to remember that Israel was the fourth largest Army in the world while Hezbollah had no weapons and a very limited structure of fighters stretching to a figure of just hundreds. He said that ideologically a Hezbollah fighter believes that he is on the right track, is strong-willed in his beliefs, knows that he is sacrificing himself for his country, and is a self-restrained fighter. Militarily, he is involved in no other activity but resistance, "and we have spent our years preparing ourselves to face Israel for we always believed that it would be aggressive again," he said.

Dr Fayyad said the first step was to adopt guerrilla tactics. The new element this time, he pointed out, was the rocket weaponry. "We cannot buy tanks and aircraft. Besides, even if we could, we would not be able to smuggle these in. But it was quite easy to smuggle in the rockets after buying these from the world market," he said. He said Hezbollah placed great stress on this "rocket strategy" and, today, possessed three kinds of rockets, each effective against tanks, ships and aircraft respectively.

Hezbollah has succeeded in sinking an Israeli ship with posters carrying Hassan Nasrallah's portrait against the backdrop of a sinking ship available all across the Arab world. The rockets

and the guerrilla tactics have made this aggression impossible for Israel with Dr Fayyad pointing out that it had attacked Lebanon this time positive that it would be able to walk through to Beirut.

The images of war and the tragedy are more than visible in Beirut: the schools, squares and hotels giving shelter to refugees from south Lebanon, the periodic sound of bomb explosions, the patients with burn injuries, fractures and lacerations in hospitals battling for life and trying to come to terms with the death of their relatives. Laila is lying in bed with her husband's sister crying in the bed next to her. They are the only two survivors of a family with Laila having lost her husband and two children. Her sister-in-law has lost her parents, her husband, and her brother amongst others. There is Ali, who can barely speak as he was thrown out of his van and sustained severe injuries when the bridge over which he was travelling in Beirut was hit by an Israeli bomb.

Hezbollah's Nasrallah was on TV. He only gives a statement to his own trusted network Manara, making it clear that he was not very happy with the ceasefire resolution as it sought to equate Israel's aggression with the Lebanese resistance, but he indicated even before the Lebanese government that he was quite prepared to support a ceasefire decision if that is what the government here agreed to. But he made it clear that this would be conditional to an Israeli ceasefire as the war was still not over, Israel was continuing with the bombing, and so Hezbollah was well within its rights to retaliate. He said the resolution should have had a clause to condemn the Israelis for killing civilians in Lebanon, and that they should have been made to pay a penalty. He was strong, understated, quiet, but very confident. He made it clear that Hezbollah could continue with the war, but that it wanted peace, and if Israel stopped so would Hezbollah. In Beirut on Sunday there was a certain expectancy in the air, despite the renewed Israeli bombing, that finally the Israelis would pull back and peace and calm would return to this nation torn by war. ■

# Bombing till the Last Minute

Walden Bello

**BEIRUT, 14 August 2006 6.17am: I got** awakened a few minutes ago by two massive blasts. They sounded very close, but they were probably coming from South Beirut. I am in Central Beirut. With the ceasefire due to take effect in less than an hour, the Israelis are bombing up till the last minute. These guys are unbelievable. Then I remember I have to file a story on what happened the day before, August 13.

"We could have been there," Rep. Mujiv Hatanan of Mindanao remarks quietly after it is confirmed that the blasts we heard just moments before were those of Israeli shells falling on the Shia neighborhoods in South Beirut that we visited just two hours ago.

"The images of flattened buildings and still smoldering ruins and crushed, dust-covered cars

are still fresh in our minds. I also remember the teddy bear, the child stroller, and the books I saw as I clambered over the ruins of a 12-story building at the neighborhood of Haret Hreik."

## ***"The most dangerous day"***

"Today is the most dangerous day in this war," the restaurant manager tells us as the delegation sits down for lunch thankful for our good luck but also very angry at the Israelis. "They know that people will let down their guard now that a ceasefire has been agreed to. But they want to make things uncertain for us until the very last minute."

Nahla Chahal, the Lebanese activist coordinating the visit of our 12-person civil society-parliamentary delegation, agrees: "They can't accept the fact that they've not been able to beat Hezbollah, so they'll terrorize the civilian population till the very end."

After walking through the ruins of South Beirut earlier in the day, we move on to Beirut University General Hospital. We briefly visit Firas Chahal, a 27 year old man suffering internal and external wounds after being thrown out of a minibus when an Israeli jet bombed the bridge at the Casino du Liban that we had to take a detour around on the way to Beirut.

Confined at a nearby room is Khaleek Mahmoud, a 68 year old grandmother whose legs were shattered after the roof of her house collapsed on her when Israeli warplanes pounded her village in South Lebanon. "Israel is a tyrannical state," she tells us. "You should go down there and see for yourselves."

### ***Children of war***

After visiting the hospital, we hurry to the Ecole El Ghoul in downtown Beirut, which serves as temporary quarters for 355 people from 66 families from the South. One million Lebanese have been displaced by the war, so the conditions of the people we meet are typical of those of a full third of the country. "The integration of the refugees into old neighborhoods brings its share of problems," says Nahla Chahal. "The Hezbollah, however, is trying its best to provide the social services to support the people in this school."

Children and adolescents fill the courtyard and

greet our delegation with glee, taking advantage of every photo opportunity. For a few moments, confronted by this sea of smiles, the war seems far away. The younger ones readily break out into cheers when Vijaya Chauhan, one of our delegation members who has worked with women and children in India, waves and talks to them. Then they break out into a chant that invokes the name of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah that translates roughly into "Nasrallah, we're with you/ You can bomb Tel Aviv."

### ***A stoic people***

After the lunch disrupted by the sound of Israeli bombs falling in South Beirut, we spend most of the afternoon with Lebanese NGOs assessing the scale of the humanitarian and ecological disaster and looking ahead to post-cease fire cooperation. Two massive blasts interrupt our discussion, but our Lebanese hosts continue talking, assuring us that the sounds came from Israeli Navy boats shelling South Beirut a few miles away.

At dinner at a restaurant later that evening, the sound of explosions in South Beirut does not deter people at a nearby table from continuing to carouse loudly. The Israelis are bombing up till the last minute to terrorize the Lebanese. It's not working. These people are very angry, but they're used to war and are not about to let it get in the way of living their lives. These are brave, stoic people. ■

# In Beirut, Jubilation and Trepidation

Herbert Docena

**BEIRUT, 14 August 2006: Hussein Choumer** hangs around one corner in the district of Haret Hreik in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Around him are mountains of rubble, the remains of over 100 mostly 10-storey residential buildings flattened by Israeli missiles now turned monuments of destruction. Books, towels, washing machines, and mattresses are strewn on the streets, covered with a thick film of powdered concrete and ash. The last page in a calendar shows the day it all started: July 12; the hands of the clock in one shop is stuck at 12:25. The air is redolent with the strange mix of filth and gunpowder.

Hussein, his wife, and three children used to live here. His house is gone. And yet, "I consider my loss as nothing," Hussein says. "What matters is that our brothers are fighting in southern Lebanon fighting. And as they fight, they're giving me back my home." Two hours later, a volley of Israeli bunker-buster bombs once again hit the neighborhood.

Sixty of the thousands of families who lost their homes in these suburbs have camped out in a school in central Beirut. Outside, a large picture of Hezbollah's leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah hangs at the center of a clothesline over the narrow street. The atmosphere inside is anything but despondent. Over a hundred children are running around the small courtyard playing. In a little while, they burst into a chant "We love Nasrallah!" The adults follow. These families have just lost everything. They're having the time of their lives.

With over 1,400 dead, more than 3,000 wounded, over a million displaced, and entire districts and villages in ruins, Lebanon today marked the "cessation of hostilities" with a heady mix of awe and anxiety, lamentation and celebra-

tion.

Hussein's and the displaced families' steadfastness is perhaps among the most visible manifestation of how Israel failed to achieve the military objectives behind this war. If the point of the massive thirty-day aerial bombardment and leveling of villages was meant to strike fear in people, as many Lebanese believe, then the result may have been the opposite.

In the south, site of the most intense fighting and devastation, the sound of explosion came from firecrackers and celebratory gunfire instead of from artillery and bombs. Beginning at 8:15 in the morning, or barely fifteen minutes into the ceasefire, thousands of families began streaming back to their emptied towns. If the aim of Israel was to conduct ethnic cleansing in the south, then the effort seems to have failed for now.

"The Hezbollah offers its victory to the Lebanese people," says Dr Ali Fayyad, a member of the political bureau of the Hezbollah. It has been an offer that many in Lebanon seems to have readily accepted. At night, at exactly the same time that US President George Bush was on TV calling the Hezbollah "terrorists who want to deprive the Lebanese freedom," convoys with young people were driving around Beirut's streets, blaring their horns, cheering wildly, and waving Hezbollah's and Lebanon's flags. In street corners, young and old alike gathered in small crowds to hand out Nasrallah's pictures to passing motorists.

Despite persistent attempts to cast the Hezbollah as an isolated "terrorist organization" of Shia Muslims, majority of the Lebanese population -- including Christians and Sunni Muslims -- have thrown their support behind the group. In one recent local survey, 87% of the population was reported to be supporting the Hezbollah, including

four out every five Christians and Druze and nine out of every ten Sunni Muslims.

But while most Lebanese acknowledge Hezbollah's leading role in fighting is Israel, what many Lebanese consistently refer to as the "national resistance" is a broad coalition that includes virtually all of Lebanon's most important political forces, including Amal, the other main Shia movement, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), other left groups and liberal democrats -- and even the right-wing Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun.

"We have a joke that, in the average Lebanese family with seven children, four will children be with the Hezbollah, two will be with the communist, and one will be with Amal -- all of them with the resistance," shares Khaled Hadadeh, secretary-general of the LCP.

The LCP, a leftist secular party whose memberships cuts across the confessional lines, has itself been very close to the Hezbollah and fought alongside them in the frontlines in the south. According to Hadadeh, at least 12 LCP members and supporters died in the fighting.

The war was not, as was frequently reported, just between Israel and Hezbollah. Contrary to Bush's claim that the Hezbollah actions have been in defiance of Lebanon's government, the Lebanese government, since the outbreak of war, has consistently supported the Hezbollah's positions and demands. Hezbollah for its part has vowed to abide by the Lebanese government's concessions.

Most Lebanese believe that it is this unity among the otherwise divided Lebanese groups that ultimately inflicted defeat on Israel. "This unity is especially significant because Lebanon has been a country that's been at war with itself," points out Anwar Al-Khalil, a member of parliament from Amal. The groups who now comprise the "national resistance" were at opposing sides of Beirut's dividing lines during Lebanon's civil war in the 80s and 90s.

Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, a Maronite Christian said: "We have come out of this stronger, more united than ever before. Israel would now think twice before coming to attack us again." If Israel's aim was to foment Lebanon's sectarian and religious divisions in the hope of pitting the Christians and the Sunnis against the Hezbollah, then the strategy may have backfired.

Despite the celebrations, however, the Lebanese are not even done counting their dead. "This victory came with a heavy price," says Hadadeh. "Now we're still calculating how much we have paid."

Ayoub Hmaied from Bint Jabeil, one of the towns at the heart of the clashes in the south, rattled off a list of villages where Israel's missiles led to a massacre of civilians: Bekaa, Brital, Haissa, Srifa, Qana, Ashaiya... At 6 AM, just two hours before the "cessation of hostilities" took effect, Israel bombed Israel's southern suburbs in what seemed like a coup de grace for this phase of the war.

"We are now in a cloudy time," says Al-Khalil. "We cannot say we have arrived at the end."

For now, though, the Lebanese are still in awe at what they have achieved. As many Lebanese like to remind their guests these days, in 1967, it took only six days for Israel to defeat all of the Arab armies combined. Now, even after thirty-three days of massive and unrelenting bombardment, what they call their "national resistance" is still standing.

Considering that Israel is said to be the world's most powerful military and the recipient of billions of dollars in cutting-edge military technology, points out Hezbollah's Fayyad, that is no mean feat.

And this, believes Nahla Chahal, a half-Iraqi, half-Lebanese activist, is why Hezbollah is so threatening to Israel and the United States. "They show not only that it's possible to resist but that it's possible to resist and win." ■



# A Bittersweet Day

Walden Bello

**BEIRUT, 14 August, 2006: The bittersweet** mood in Beirut on this day when the ceasefire took effect was perhaps best expressed by Rahul, a taxi driver, who tells me, "We won, but at what cost? So many people displaced, so many dead, so many buildings destroyed."

The final toll of this war is still being counted but it is likely that the death count will go above 1400 and the economic damage will reach \$6 billion.

As soon as the cessation of hostilities came into effect at 8 am, cars and vans and trucks started to roll down to the South as people who took refuge in the Beirut and other parts of the country went back to their homes. "They'll most likely find their houses gone, but their lands will still be there and there's really no place like home," says Anwar El Khalil, an MP representing the area of Marieyoun, the site of the strafing of a civilian convoy by Israeli planes last week, who himself is eager to return home. With a full third of the country's inhabitants having been displaced from their homes, a massive civilian movement is expected to bring traffic along the country's main highways to a crawl in the next few days.

## ***The losers***

There is no doubt about who the loser is in this war. Everyone we talk to in this day of national pride agrees with the editorial in the Daily Star, Lebanon's liberal English language paper, that states that "The Israeli government has been discredited and serious wrinkles in the US-Israeli relationship have been exposed. The Israelis now have to contend with a political arena that is in disarray." With even members of the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert saying Israel has lost the war, the Jewish state is indeed plunged into its worst political crisis in years. Perhaps the prevailing mood in the Israeli establishment is reflected in Haaretz commentator Zeev Schiff's call

for a "reconsideration of the military and strategic management after the facts have proved that the army is no longer capable of adapting to the kind of warfare imposed by Hezbollah."

Nor is there doubt about who the other loser is. For many Lebanese politicians and analysts, there is a strong conviction that this war was planned by Washington way before the Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid in early July. During our brief visit with him, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud tells our peace delegation, "We know that the Israeli offensive was planned way in advance, with the support of external forces." MP El Khalil is not shy about identifying the US as the real author of this war, and he points to a recent article in the New Yorker by Seymour Hersh that claims that US neo-conservatives had a grand plan for restructuring the Middle East via Israeli military force as early as 1996.

Destruction of the Hezbollah was perhaps even more vital for the United States than Israel, claims Henri Barkey, chairman of Lehigh University's International Relations Department and a former member of the US state department's policy planning staff. In a recent article, Barkey claims that while Israel can live with a Hezbollah driven north of the Litani River, the US would not. The key reason has to do with the "Hizbullah model." According to Barkey, "it represents the nightmarish metamorphosis of a well supplied and trained militia. If it can work in Lebanon, the model can be emulated elsewhere around the world -- Hizbullah is far more sophisticated and entrenched than Al Qaeda. It is impossible to defeat it without inflicting civilian casualties. Therein lies Hezbollah's strength: it calculates that the outside world will relent in the face of civilian casualties." In this view, the triumph of the Hezbollah over Israel is the worst of all possible worlds.

## ***The victor***

For the Lebanese, the view is very different. In the thirty day war, most of the country's political groups and most of the country have come together in supporting the struggle against Israeli aggression led by the Shiite Muslim-led organization. First among these is the country's Maronite Christian President Emile Lahoud, who is not shy about praising "the leadership of Hezbollah in the national resistance." Everybody acknowledges that Hezbollah's sterling military performance is the source of what the Daily Star calls the "unprecedented level of solidarity" of Lebanese society today. Domestic critics who, at the start of the war, accused Hezbollah of dragging Lebanon into war by capturing two Israeli soldiers for prisoner-exchange purposes are quiet in these heady days of national pride.

If anything has been put to rest by the events of the last 30 days, it is the lie that the Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. Deliberate Israeli targeting of civilian targets while Hezbollah fighters focused on fighting Israeli soldiers has put the shoe on the other foot. Indeed, there is now a massive clamor among international civil society groups to try the Israeli political leaders and the army for war crimes and state-sponsored terror.

It has not only been Hezbollah's military prowess that has been on display but also its tremendous capacity to provide welfare services, in this instance for the country's displaced population. Indeed, in a country whose social services, especially for the poor, are very backward, Hezbollah's social infrastructure is a model of efficient modernity. It runs, for instance, 46 medical centers and a hospital. Its Jihad for Construction, which supervised the material and social infrastructure of South Lebanon in the 1990s, is now poised to manage an even more massive post-war reconstruction.

Also on display on both the local scene and the international stage have been the talented intellectuals and spokespersons of the Hezbollah, among who is Dr Ali Fayyad, the head of the organization's Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation (CCSD), which has produced more

than 300 reports on social, economic, political, and administrative issues.

An urbane intellectual, Dr Ali explains to us that there were three main reasons for Hezbollah's victory. One was the employment of rockets to neutralize Israeli airpower and give Hezbollah an offensive air capability without airplanes. The second was the Hezbollah's use of guerrilla warfare, which stymied an Israeli Army used to fighting conventional Arab armies. Third was the Hezbollah fighter who is "not only a guerrilla trained in self reliance but is also filled with ideological conviction that he is on the right track."

Switching to another topic, Fayyad says that while Hezbollah's policies are "of course, determined principally by internal Lebanese considerations, we also consider the Palestinian struggle and international solidarity." It is this Arabic and internationalist perspective that has given Hezbollah a great deal of resonance throughout not only the Arab world but in other parts of the globe. Hezbollah leaders speak with admiration of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and the admiration is said to be mutual. Fayyad, a member of the Hezbollah's political bureau, became one of the public faces of Hezbollah during the thirty day war, forcing him to switch cars and lodgings almost every night since it was assumed that he was a prime Israeli target.

Beirut in the evening of 14 August is a city filled with sorrow and pride, with the latter clearly dominant. Throughout the city, there are motorcades celebrating Hezbollah and its General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah. Everyone tunes in when Nasrallah comes on television at nine o'clock to announce what he considers a "tremendous strategic victory for Lebanon" and announces Hezbollah's preparedness to withdraw its fighters behind the Litani River.

As he speaks, a high official of the Lebanese Communist Party, perhaps the epitome of secular politics in Lebanon, says of the man who is the face of Islamic politics, "There is our Arab Che Guevara -- with a turban." ■

# Why did the Lebanese Resistance Accept 1701?

Feroze H. Mithiborwala

**BEIRUT, 15 August 2006: Undoubtedly the** national Lebanese resistance has emerged victorious in the war against Israeli aggression. We came here in solidarity with the Lebanese people and to witness the "muqawama" or resistance. But we were in fact fortunate to witness the victory of Lebanon over the military might of Israel. The wheels of history are turning and the people of the world have drawn immense hope and inspiration from the courageous Lebanese Resistance led by the Hezbollah and its secretary general Sheikh Hassan Nasrullah. The Lebanese resistance was also supported by the Lebanese Communist Party and they fought shoulder to shoulder with their comrades in the Hezbollah and the Amal and the other patriotic parties and organisations. The unity of the Lebanese people across all religions and classes and the resilience and resistance of the civil society have also been central to the triumph over Israel and the US.

In the jubilation all around, it is imperative that we understand the meaning of UN resolution 1701. What Israel and America suffered militarily, they are trying to salvage diplomatically. It is true that Hezbollah did succeed in driving out Israel from the occupied lands of South Lebanon during a prolonged war between 1982 and 2000. But this time they have defeated the Israeli army in 34 days. Israel lost more than 100 soldiers and 40 Merkava tanks and moreover they did not succeed in capturing a single village or town. The only

success for Israel was its slaughter of [an estimated] 1500 innocent civilians and the wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Then the question lies as to why did the Lebanese resistance agree to 1701 when they in reality had the Israelis in the corner. We spoke to the representatives of the resistance and this is what emerged.

It is true that the resistance accepted 1701 and was in agreement with the Lebanese government but with some reservations that they have commented upon. The first priority of the resistance was to arrive at a truce whereby the Israeli policy of imposing "collective punishment" by widespread targeted killings of civilians would be brought to a halt. And that indeed has been brought to a halt. The resistance has appealed for the people to return to their homes in South Lebanon and has also announced that all the destroyed homes and infrastructure will be rebuilt. Hasan Nasrallah has called this the "Jihad al-binah" or the Jihad for reconstruction. The faith that the people have on the resistance is so immense that in spite of the presence of Israeli troops in the South, the people are going back to their destroyed homes and farms in their hundreds of thousands.

The other aspect that should be clarified is that 1701 is not a "ceasefire" but an "end to hostilities" and there is a significant difference between the two terms that may not be as apparent. Basically

end of hostilities means that Israel will now stop targeting civilian populated areas and that has now given a respite to the people. On the other hand the "ceasefire" is between the resistance and Israel. Which basically means that if a tank or Israeli soldiers intrude further into Lebanese lands, the resistance will fight back. Also the resistance has unambiguously stated that the "state of war" will continue until Israel vacates all occupied Lebanese territory, including the Shebaa farms. So the end of hostility agreement will remove the civilians from immediate danger and then the battle will be between the resistance and Israel.

I asked Ali Fayyad, the political ideologue of the Hezbollah, as to what prevents Israel from again targeting civilian areas under the same old pretext that Hezbollah was firing the rockets from those very areas. Ali Fayyad clearly stated that they valued the lives of civilians more than Israel and this is proved by the number of civilian casualties suffered by both sides. But he also believed that Israel will not target the civilians again due to international pressure since they have also lost the diplomatic and political battle. In spite of resolution 1701, Israel has announced the siege of Lebanon by land, sea and air. The resistance is studying and analysing this as it clearly violates Article 1 of 1701 and international law as it will clearly harm the Lebanese nation. The agreement also speaks of respecting the "blue line" or the Lebanese-Israeli border. Ali Fayyad stated that "unless there is a total withdrawal of Israeli soldiers, we will carry on the struggle and we will discuss the disarming of the Hezbollah only after we are liberated and Israel refrains from all future wars of aggression."

The fact of the matter is that it is only the resistance or the muqawama that can face up to the Israeli army. Lebanon lacks a army capable of taking on Israel. Even the President Emile Lahoud stated that "the only force capable of countering the Israeli aggression is the resistance. Our army is

only meant for internal policing and is lightly armed. It was Israel that started this war and they always find an excuse. Unlike some others within the Arab world, I was confident that the resistance would be capable of fighting and defeating the Israeli army. Even though in terms of conventional arms the balance is overwhelmingly in favour of Israel, our guerilla resistance has proved victorious. That is why they want to disarm the Hezbollah, so that Israel can once again reoccupy Lebanon as in 1982."

Even Khalid Hadadh, secretary general of the Lebanese Communist Party, supports the Lebanese resistance and said they they will resist the Israeli aggression in alliance with the Hezbollah. Commenting on Hassan Nasrallah he stated that "he is our Arab Che Guevara with a turban". Regarding 1701 Hadadh was of the opinion that it is a contradiction and will only lead to a tenuous peace since it rewards the aggressor.

One basic factor of the Lebanese victory has been the unity of the people unlike Afghanistan and Iraq. The left forces and the Hezbollah are doing their utmost to preserve this unity and are in dialogue with all the political parties and social segments. Comrade Khalid also emphatically defended the Hezbollah and called it the party of the downtrodden and the deprived. Hezbollah, he said was "part of every household and is mass socio-political movement for liberation". Comrade Khalid Hadadh also said that the "defeat of the resistance will spell the end of Lebanon as a multi-religious and modern democratic society and that is why we stand in solidarity with the Hezbollah which is the vanguard of the resistance."

The victory of the Lebanese people will lead to the consolidation of the anti-imperialist upsurge the world over and will indeed give it a new direction and momentum against the global project of US-Israeli imperialism. We truly stand witness to a historic moment for the people of the world.

# The Jumpy Ladies of Lebanon

Treated like modern-day slaves, Filipina domestic workers in Lebanon have jumped off buildings to escape from Israeli bombs and abusive Lebanese employers.

Herbert Docena

**BEIRUT, August 2006: Miramar Flores stood** on the ledge of her master's second-floor balcony. As she tried to make up her mind -- whether to stay on under the Israeli bombardment or to flee -- it may well have occurred to her that it was a choice between death and death.

"If you don't die from jumping, you die from nervousness," recalls Flores, a 25-year-old domestic helper from Bacolod City. She chose to jump. She says that when she hit the ground, she thought it was the end.

The pain in her legs assured her it wasn't.

Still, she ran and ran until she somehow found her way to the Philippine embassy in central Beirut. Flores says she had been locked up by her employers. "This was my last chance to escape," she

says.

Flores is one of around twenty Filipinas in Lebanon so far who have taken a leap, literally. Like Jezebel Guillermo, a 31-year-old domestic helper from Isabela, Flores is grateful she survived her fall. But at least one other worker has not been as lucky; in another case, it's not clear whether the worker jumped or was deliberately pushed to her death. Five others are feared to have gone mad.

Flores' and Guillermo's decisions to jump came largely from fear of being war casualties. Yet according to non-government organizations, Filipino workers in Lebanon have been jumping off buildings even before the recent war broke out.

In 2004, six Filipinos working in Lebanese households died under "mysterious" circumstances after falling from buildings -- "mysterious" because while their employers claim the workers

committed suicide, their fellow workers say some of them may have been thrown off the buildings by their employers. Apart from the Filipinos, 47 Sri Lankan workers are also reported to have committed suicides in 1997 alone.

Helen Dabu, who is with the Kanlungan Center Foundation, an organization that has dealt directly with victims of abuse from Lebanon and elsewhere, says the women jump off buildings out of despair. In 2000, the last year a database was compiled by the Lebanese Pastoral Committee for Afro-Asian Migrant Workers, there were over 400 reported cases of physical and sexual abuse against migrant workers, half of the victims Filipinas.

Filipino workers suffer from abuse all over the world. But while it is difficult to accurately say whether Filipinos are better off or worse off in Lebanon than in other overseas Filipino workers (OFW) destinations, Dabu says that the Middle East (including Lebanon) is the region from where they receive the most reports of abusive employers. Such cases outnumber those reported in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Malaysia where the complaint involve more contract violations rather than rape or maltreatment. Dabu's assessment is supported by Philippine labor attaché to Lebanon Ma. Glenda Manalo, who says this is also the view of many other diplomats working in the region.

### ***Tenth most popular destination***

Lebanon is the tenth top destination of Filipino workers abroad, although Philippine Ambassador to Lebanon Francis Bichara himself admits that they can't actually say for sure how many Filipinos are in the country, since many are smuggled in. Research done by Kanlungan, however, indicates that the number could be as high as 50,000. Filipino workers have been arriving in Lebanon since 1978 but it is only in the last eight years, after the end of the civil war, that Filipinos have been coming here in droves. Last year alone, over 14,000 are known to have entered the country. According to Manalo, up to 99 percent of those who come here work as domestic helpers, almost all of them women.

This is why it was mostly women who wound up in a Roman Catholic school-turned-processing center for Filipinos evacuating from the war.

Since Israel's aggression started on July 12, over 4,000 Filipino migrant workers -- the majority of them women -- have passed through the center, waiting for the next bus to Damascus, where they would then take the plane home.

Most of their employers had refused to let them go. As the women workers tell it, their respective bosses said they would be released only if they paid back the \$2,000 their bosses had given to recruitment agencies for each of them. The women also surrendered their passports to their employers upon arrival in Lebanon, so many of those who have managed to make it to the center do not have any travel documents with them.

Ironically, the war -- and the unprecedented public attention that came with it -- has given workers an opening not just to flee from the bombs but also to free themselves from their abusive masters. One of them is Jonalyn Malibago, 26, from Quirino province, whose face is still swollen as she recounts her tale.

Working from five in the morning to midnight every day -- without a single day off - for the last six months, Malibago says her employers had been treating her so badly that she had been wanting to return home for months. But she couldn't because she didn't have enough money: for the first three months, her salary went directly to the employment agency that got her here. Promised \$200 a month when she was still in Manila, she found out -- as most other Filipinas do when they arrive in Lebanon -- that she was to get only \$150.

As the war dragged on, Malibago found the reason and the courage to tell her employers she was leaving. Her employers replied by beating her up, rendering her unconscious. Malibago had to be taken to the hospital afterward. Yet she tried asking again, threatening to jump off their building if they refused.

The employers seemed to relent and got her into the car. Then the entire family -- husband, wife, two teenage sons -- also entered the vehicle, but instead of driving her to the Philippine embassy or the church, they beat her up again so badly her arms and legs are still deep blue and violet.

Her masters then threw her out of the car, directly into a garbage dump. Barely conscious, Malibago somehow picked herself up and walked away, eventually ending up at the center.

### ***Approaching "indentured labor" conditions***

"You're safe now, they can't touch you here," a domestic worker who signed up as a volunteer says to Mary Jane Garcia, 26, a newly arrived escapee who had walked out into the highway in the middle of the night and hitchhiked her way to the center.

Earlier, at the receiving area, Garcia's employers had caught up with her and -- in front of everyone -- accused her of stealing. They ordered her to go back home with them, but Garcia was adamant. Denying their allegations, she stood her ground and shot back at her employers angrily, managing to insert some Arabic phrases: "You make me work from six am to four am. You also make me work at the factory. Even when I was sick, you made me work."

"Did I ever hit you?" the male employer turns to Mary Cleofe Libunga, 35, who worked with Garcia in the same household. Libunga just looks at him accusingly, but says nothing.

Enter Chona Lamberte, 26, from Bohol, crying inconsolably. She tells the volunteer at the reception that her employers forbade her to leave and they still don't know she had ran away. She's scared, she says. They might come and get her.

These scenes are typical, says Rina Velasco, 26, a volunteer in charge of filing the evacuees' travel papers that are being issued in lieu of missing passports. While there are also tearful goodbyes from those who had been lucky enough to be with

kind employers, she says, "over 70 percent of Lebanese employers treat their employees badly." Another employee at the embassy, a Lebanese national, thinks the figure is closer to 99 percent.

"Rare is an OFW with a positive experience in Lebanon," says Kanlungan's Dabu. Prohibited from even saying "hello" to fellow Filipinas in public places, made to sleep on the kitchen floor, and placed on call to do their masters' bidding 24 hours a day, the conditions of these workers approach that of "indentured labor, even white slavery," says UP Professor Walden Bello, who interviewed dozens of OFWs in Beirut as part of an international delegation.

With this kind of relationships they have with their employers, the parting scenes at the evacuation center have been anything but friendly.

At one point, says Velasco, the bodyguard of a general drew a gun and threatened to shoot a Filipina worker if she refused to go back with them.

### ***Protection of rights prove tricky***

At least these days the Philippine government seems ready to help the workers as much as it can. Prior to the war, it didn't look that way to some people here. According to Dabu, long before Israel began dropping bombs on Lebanon, Filipina workers had been knocking on the embassy's door for help. But instead of giving them shelter, embassy officials took the workers back to their employers, she says. Abandoned and with nowhere else to go, she says, some of them would eventually decide to jump off buildings.

In September 2004, Kanlungan helped some abused workers file cases against the then Filipino labor attaché in Lebanon. The cases are still with the Ombudsman. The attaché has been transferred to Rome.

Current labor attaché Manalo, who assumed her post here in June last year, maintains that the embassy never had any abused worker returned to their employer.

In any case, most of those who ran away from their employers eventually began going to churches or to NGOs for refuge, says Dabu. The name of Sister Amelia Torres, a Filipino nun who has been with the Daughters of Charity here in Lebanon for the past 18 years, is on everybody's lips and is known to most as the person to go when the going gets tough.

Tina Naccache, a Lebanese social worker who has been working on migrant workers' issues for years, relates how their organizations once proposed enforcing a common contract that would have laid down the minimum working conditions and compensation that should be guaranteed to workers.

But the agencies opposed this and insisted instead that they be included as a party to the contract. This would have given them more power over workers, Naccache explains. What shocked Naccache, however, was when the representative of the Philippine embassy endorsed the agencies' position.

The present labor attaché says that they see the inclusion of the agencies in the contract as a "temporary" arrangement. "While the Lebanese government is still very weak on protecting migrant workers," Manalo says, "we have to hold the agencies responsible for the workers."

Migrants' organizations are skeptical of this arrangement since agencies -- having had already collected the \$2,000 placement fee from the employers -- simply do not have the financial incentive to be responsible. In fact, they point out, agencies have often taken the side of employers in disputes with workers. They would also be the first to force runaway workers to return to their employers; otherwise these employers would demand that the fees they paid be returned.

Fortunately, says Naccache, the proposal has been blocked by the Lebanese labor minister who happens to belong to the Hezbollah, the armed political party that is the target of Israel's ire. Unlike the other parties, she says, the Hezbollah

has no ties to employment agencies and their members often don't employ domestic workers in their household. Another social worker who refused to be named says that for all of his disagreements with the Hezbollah, it is the only Islamic group he respects because of their position toward migrants.

Manalo, however, points out that the Lebanese labor ministry couldn't even compel Lebanese employers to compensate workers for unpaid services, much less make them accountable for abuses they commit. This is because Lebanese labor laws do not cover migrant workers. Saying she has been "saddened" by the plight of OFWs in Lebanon, Manalo has recommended temporarily suspending workers to the country while they "cleanse" the recruitment and placement industry of agencies found to have violated contracts or condoned abuses against workers.

### ***Power relations***

Meanwhile, stories of abuse are bound to continue to pile up for as long as Filipinas are forced into a relationship in which their employers wield ultimate power over them. These power relations are especially tilted against Filipinas in the Middle East, where women are often seen as inferior and where citizens from third-world countries are often viewed with contempt. Here, points out Irynn Abaño of the Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA), Filipina domestic helpers are vulnerable to overlapping forms of gender, race, and class discrimination.

Having paid for the domestic helpers' services in advance, employers often see these workers as nothing more than commodities to be used as they please. Filipinas, for their part, voluntarily enter into these relationships because they have few more liberating options at home.

Having pursued economic and social policies that reduced or eliminated job opportunities at home -- but at the same time benefiting from the dollar remittances that workers abroad infuse to the local economy -- the Philippine government encourages these relationships and has, since the



1970s, deliberately promoted the export of labor. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, points out Abaño, has explicitly announced its target of deploying one million Filipino workers abroad annually. Workers running away from their employers do not help the government reach its target.

In an effort to curb abuses against Filipinos abroad, the Center for Migrant Advocacy and other groups have been pushing the government to demand that OFW-receiving countries sign an international covenant that guarantees the rights of migrant workers. But even Abaño concedes that this "covenant" has no enforcement mechanisms and prescribes no penalties. They have, however, also demanded that Manila pursue bilateral agreements with host-countries.

Yet as Abaño herself recognizes, the Philippine government really has no bargaining power because host governments know full well that it is desperate for jobs. Hence, it will do everything and accept anything that will provide employment opportunities for the locally unemployed and that will earn dollars to pay for the countries' imports. Offered overseas employment opportunities for its

citizens, the Philippine government will not walk away, even if these leave Filipinos vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Millions of its citizens are also willing to take the risk. With few employment opportunities waiting for them, many of those waiting here for the buses to take them home to the Philippines confess they are not sure what future awaits them back home. Some are resigned to come back to Lebanon when the fighting stops. "You think you'll be away long? You'll be back soon!" one Filipino taunts them half-jokingly.

The long-term solution to reduce and prevent abuses is to extricate Filipinas from the relations of powerlessness that they find themselves in. "Ultimately," says Abaño, "the real solution to the problem of abused OFWs is for the government to pursue full employment policies and to work for genuine development at home so that working abroad will just be one option."

Until then, Israel's missile launchers may fall silent, but Filipina workers may still find that jumping off buildings in lands far away from home may be the only way to escape their troubled lives. ■

*This article originally appeared in i-Report, a publication of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, on 27 August 2006.*





