

Lebanon: reportages, statements and press releases

Sunday 20 August 2006, by [BELLO Walden](#), [International Civil Society and Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon](#), [MITHIBORWALA Feroze H.](#), [MUSTAFA Seema](#) (Date first published: 19 August 2006).

FOCUS ON TRADE NUMBER 123, AUGUST 2006

<http://www.focusweb.org/content/view/1030/60/>

IN THIS ISSUE: Just one week ago, a parliamentary and civil society mission from India, the Philippines and Brazil arrived in Beirut. The delegation included Walden Bello and Herbert Docena from Focus on the Global South, together with comrades from La Via Campesina, the trade union congress of Brazil, the Indian peace movement, parliamentarians from India and the Philippines, a journalist and an interpreter. Their journey was one of solidarity and their message, expressed in the following writings and statements, is one of respect for the Lebanese people's suffering and courage, and a call for justice in the Middle East.

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NASRALLAH: NEW ARAB WORLD HERO

By Seema Mustafa

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

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.

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UNBROKEN SPIRITS FILL HIGHWAYS OF DEATH

By Seema Mustafa*

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

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 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 sombre 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, twelve persons were killed and ten 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: the women have tears in their eyes, the 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

ter, as they all say to the last child, "Israel vacates our land and we can go home."

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TRACING A TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION: REPORT FROM LEBANON

By Walden Bello*

BEIRUT, August 13, 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 air-strike 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."

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TRUCE HOPES EMERGE IN FOG OF WAR

Seema Mustafa*

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

BEIRUT, 13 August, 2006: The buildup 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 a gain 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.

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BOMBING TILL THE LAST MINUTE: REPORT FROM LEBANON 2

By Walden Bello*

BEIRUT, August 14, 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 Hataman 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.

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IN BEIRUT, JUBILATION AND TREPIDATION

By 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: 12 July; 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 clothline 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 celebration.

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, the majority of the Lebanese population — including Christians and Sunni Muslims — have thrown their support behind the group. In one recent local survey, 87 per cent of the population was reported to be supporting

the Hezbollah, including four out of five Christians and Druze and nine out of ten Sunni Muslims.

But while most Lebanese acknowledge Hezbollah's leading role in fighting in 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 be with the Hezbollah, two will be with the communist, and one will be with Amal — all of them with the resistance," shares Khalil Hadadeh, secretary-general of the LCP.

The LCP, a leftist secular party whose memberships cuts across 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 twelve 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 1980s and 1990s.

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 Jbeil, 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, Srafa, Qana, Ashaiya.

.. At 6am, 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.”

*Herbert Docena is a Research Associate with Focus on the Global South. He is in Lebanon now as a member of the International Peace and Solidarity Mission.

14 AUGUST, A BITTERSWEET DAY: REPORT FROM LEBANON 3

By 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 civil

ian 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 Ohlmert 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 ha

d 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 depa

rtment’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.” Acc

ording 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.

” 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 Shii

te 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 Lebane

se 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 p
ride.

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 fighti

ng 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."

*Walden Bello is professor of sociology at the University of the Philippines and executive director of the research and advocacy institute Focus on the Global South based in Bangkok. He is one of the members of the International Civil Society and Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon.

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 Nasrallah. 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. Hassan Nasrallah has called this the “Jihad al-binah” or the Jihad for reconstruction. The faith that the people have in 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 an 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 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.

* Feroze H. Mithiborwala, Forum Against War and Terror, Mumbai

PRESS RELEASE: INTERNATIONAL PEACE DELEGATION GOES TO LEBANON

11 August, 2006

Responding to calls by Lebanese civil society organizations to come to their war-ravaged country, another batch of parliamentarians and civil society representatives from various countries are going on an international peace and solidarity delegation to Lebanon from August 12 to 16.

This delegation includes representatives from the Philippines, Brazil, France, Norway, India, and Spain.

Among them are two members of parliament, two representatives from the international farmers' movement La Via Campesina, a representative from Brazil's main trade union confederation and the continental alliance Hemispheric Social Alliance, a journalist, and other peace and human rights activists. (please see full list below)

The delegation hopes to convey solidarity with the people of Lebanon; gather first-hand information on the impact of the war; better understand the current political situation in the country; and add their voices to their global call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

In Lebanon, the delegation will inspect areas hit by Israeli missiles; visit relief centers and hospitals; meet with a broad range of civil society and political organizations; speak with top officials of the Lebanese government; and meet with migrant workers' also in the country.

This delegation is the latest batch to go to Lebanon upon the invitation of local groups and it is hoped that more will follow in the future.

MISSION MEMBERS

Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South

Kjeld Jakobsen, CUT Brazil and Hemispheric Social Alliance

Gérard Durand, Confédération Paysanne, France, La Via Campesina

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

Mujiv Hataman, Member of Parliament, Anak Mindanao, Philippines

Herbert Docena, Focus on the Global South

Seema Mustafa, Resident Editor, Asian Age

Feroze Mithiborwala, Forum Against War and Terror, Mumbai

Kamal Chenoy, All India Peace and Solidarity Organisation, Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), India

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

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

Germ?n Guillot, interpreter (French/Spanish/English/Arabic)

STATEMENT ON THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES IN LEBANON
BY THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND PARLIAMENTARY PEACE MISSION Press
conference,
Beirut, 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, it
s 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 p
arts of the global imperialist project.

The courageous Lebanese National Resistance led by the Hezbollah and its secretary general Hassan Nasrallah has led to this historic victory. The unity of the Lebanese people across religions and classes, and the resista
nce 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 vio
lation 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 billion
s 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, in
cluding 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.

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DECLARATION BY LA VIA CAMPESINA ON ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE LEBANESE SOLIDARITY MISSION

16 August 2006

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 the 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 Kobberod of NBS (Norwegian Small Holders Union) - Norway

FINDINGS OF INTERNATIONAL MISSION TO LEBANON

Filipinas in Lebanon treated like 'modern-day slaves'
Hezbollah not seen as 'terrorist' organisation

Press release, Manila, 18 August 2006

Filipina overseas workers in Lebanon are being treated like "modern-day slaves," this was the main finding of Filipinos who had just arrived from Lebanon as part of an international civil society and parliamentary delegation.

"The working conditions of Filipinos in Lebanon are terrible," said Rep. Mujiv Hataman, Anak Mindanao party-list representative.

"They are promised \$200-a-month salary when they are in Manila but they get only \$150 when they arrive in Lebanon. They work from 5am to 12 midnight everyday without any day-off. Some of them are even made to work in factories, after working at their employers' households," Hataman said, summarizing their interviews with dozens of Filipinas in the Philippine evacuation center in Beirut.

"Their situation approaches that of indentured labor, even white slavery," observed Dr Walden Bello, a professor at the University of the Philippines, who also took part in the mission.

The mission demands that the deployment of Filipinos to work as domestic workers abroad is rendered unnecessary through the creation of employment opportunities at home. Meanwhile, the mission denounced the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration for its failure to protect the welfare of Filipinos abroad.

In particular, they recommend the banning of and the filing of charges against Filipino and Lebanese employment agencies that are found to have abused workers. They also recommend studying the possibility of totally doing away with employment agencies and transferring their role of finding jobs, recruiting workers, and dealing with employers to the government.

"The employment agencies are like modern-day slave traders who are getting rich on the back of Filipinos. They automatically deduct the first three-months of salary from the workers. They promise \$200 a month to workers who end up receiving only \$150 a month. In case of emergencies like this

war, they care less about the welfare of the workers than about minimizing costs," said Herbert Docena, a representative of the Stop the War Coalition-Philippines. "The government, for its part, condones this arrangement."

Despite the bad treatment Filipinas receive from their Lebanese agencies and employers, the mission stressed that the Lebanese people do not deserve to be bombed by Israel.

"Ultimately, the bombs that were falling on Lebanon and putting the Filipinos in danger came from Israel. Their decision to initiate the aggression is unjustifiable; their decision to put Filipinos, along with the Lebanese, under "collective punishment", is a violation of international law," says Docena, whose group Stop the War Coalition-Philippines, has been calling for the withdrawal of the Philippine ambassador from Israel and the cutting of diplomatic ties with the country until it ends its occupation of Palestine.

Contrary to most media reports, the Hezbollah is not seen as a "terrorist" organisation by the vast majority of the Lebanese people, the mission found. It is part of what the Lebanese call the "national resistance" that includes not just the Hezbollah but other Christian and secular groups.