

Lebanon government joins forces with bid to have Blair tried in Scotland for war crimes

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THE Lebanese government is working behind the scenes to bring Tony Blair before the Scottish courts, charged with war crimes for aiding and abetting the Israeli onslaught against Lebanon.

Ali Berro, the Lebanese government's special adviser on legal affairs, is assisting Lebanese nationals living in Scotland, and their legal team, in their attempt to take the Scottish Executive and the UK government to court for allowing US aircraft to fly "bunker-buster bombs" from America to Israel via Scottish airports.

Berro is providing the legal team, led by the Glasgow-based human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar, with detailed information about alleged Israel war crimes, and also forwarding information on the casualty rates of Lebanese civilians and the type of weapons being deployed by the Israeli army. In total, some 30 lawyers, including QCs, in Scotland and England are helping prepare the case against the government.

Along with his briefing, Berro sent Anwar and his clients this message: "We are laying before you all these facts and we count on you to use all possible means of pressure to put an end to the destruction targeting civilians. We are counting on you and thank you."

The team is accusing Blair of assisting Israel in carrying out war crimes against civilians, citing various pieces of international legislation, including the Geneva Conventions, which say that it is a war crime to aid and abet a nation carrying out attacks targeted against civilians.

Berro has said he is "angry and astonished" that the UK is "assisting" Israel, claiming the UK can no longer be seen as an "honest broker" in the Middle East.

Anwar said: "The Lebanese government have made it clear that they want this conflict to stop. Both they and us are aware that every time more weapons are supplied to Israel, more Lebanese civilians will die. We wish to indict Tony Blair for war crimes as he is complicit in the war crimes of Israel by allowing the passage of arms through Scotland. This will take time, and that is why the Lebanese government is helping to catalogue information."

Berro has also supplied a legal briefing to Anwar and his clients outlining which pieces of international law have been violated. Berro said: "Since July 12, 2006, the Israeli army, which has the largest and most advanced military machinery in the region, has committed all kinds of crimes: crimes against humanity, war crimes and mass killings."

Some 750 Lebanese civilians have died in the attacks – many women and children. Berro said: “Human shreds are scattered amid the destruction.” He also outlined Israeli attacks on petrol stations, warehouses, electricity companies, places of worship, bridges, hospitals and ambulances.

Berro said the Israelis were using phosphorous bombs, and “sending ultimatums to the inhabitants of villages, waiting for them to get out and then hunting them on their way to safety”.

International legislation, which Berro said was breached by Israel, included The Hague Convention, The 1948 Convention Against Mass Killings and The Geneva Conventions.

Azam Mohamad, one of the Scottish-based Lebanese nationals taking the case against the Scottish Executive and the UK government, said: “We took this action as US aircraft are going through Prestwick airport with bombs bound for Israel that will be used to shell our families. We want to stop those bombs.”

Mohamad, the director of Glasgow’s Middle East Society, added: “We are shocked that Tony Blair has allowed aircraft carrying bombs bound for Israel to come through this country. These weapons are illegal as they are used to kill civilians. I cannot find words to explain my unhappiness at Blair’s decision. If we get a chance to take Tony Blair to court, we will do so.

“The Lebanese government will help our cause by giving us as much information as they can. Even the prime minister of Lebanon will help us in our attempt to stop these bombs being sent through Britain to destroy Lebanon. The government in Lebanon appreciates what we are doing to help protect the freedom and democracy of Lebanon.”

The Lebanese community in Scotland and England is now collectively raising the money needed to fund the legal challenge. Members of the 20-strong group of Lebanese, who have put their names to the suit against the government, have lost loved ones in the conflict, had property destroyed and seen their relatives and friends turned into refugees.

Another Lebanese national living in Scotland who is taking the case against the government, Mohamad Saadi, lost his aunt, 55-year-old Khadija, last Friday. She died of a heart attack when her area came under heavy Israeli bombing.

“It is very hard for us,” Saadi said. “Every family is suffering. This is not just about my family – everyone in Lebanon is now my family. We are calling our relatives every hour. While I am talking now something could be happening to my family back in Lebanon. A humanitarian disaster is happening.

“Blair is helping terrorism because what Israel is doing to Lebanon is terrorism – they are attacking and killing civilians. He is utterly in the wrong.”

Both Mohamad and Saadi have raised their children in Scotland and started thriving businesses in Glasgow. They say they have been overwhelmed by support from the people of Scotland towards the people of Lebanon, and on Friday launched a Scottish-Lebanese friendship society. They said that many in the large Christian community in Lebanon were now supporting Hezbollah as the Islamic militia were “the only ones fighting for us and the country”.

Zouheir Swade, another member of Glasgow’s Lebanese community backing the legal

action, told how he lost nine members of his extended family just over a week ago when his brother-in-law's house was hit by an Israeli shell.

"This is just one of many massacres in Lebanon," Swade said. "A friend and his wife and two children were also killed in their car by an Israeli bomb. I sleep for no more than two hours before I get up and turn on the news. I'm phoning my family all the time. When I hear my mother's voice I cry."

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