

'No Hezbollah Rockets Fired from Qana'

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QANA, Aug 1 (IPS) – Red Cross workers and residents of Qana, where Israeli bombing killed at least 60 civilians, have told IPS that no Hezbollah rockets were launched from the city before the Israeli air strike.

The Israeli military has said it bombed the building in which several people had taken shelter, more than half of them children, because the Army had faced rocket fire from Qana. The Israeli military has said that Hezbollah was therefore responsible for the deaths.

“There were no Hezbollah rockets fired from here,” 32-year-old Ali Abdel told IPS. “Anyone in this village will tell you this, because it is the truth.”

Abdel had taken shelter in a nearby house when the shelter was bombed at 1 am. When the bombings finally let up in the morning, he went back to the bombed shelter to search for relatives.

He found his 70-year-old father and 64-year-old mother both dead inside.

“They bombed it, and afterwards I heard the screams of women, children, and a few men — they were crying for help. But then one minute after the first bomb, another bomb struck, and after this there was nothing but silence, and the sound of more bombs around the village.”

Masen Hashen, a 30-year-old construction worker from Qana who lost several family members in the air strike on the shelter, said there were no Hezbollah rockets fired from his village. “Because if they had done that now, or in the past, all of us would have left. Because we know we would be bombed.”

Qana had been a shelter because no rockets were being fired from there, survivors said. “When Hezbollah fires their rockets, everyone runs away because they know an Israeli bombardment will come soon,” Abdel said. “That is why everyone stayed in the shelter and nearby homes, because we all thought we’d be all right since there were no Hezbollah fighters in Qana.”

Lebanese Red Cross workers in the nearby coastal city of Tyre told IPS that there was no basis for Israeli claims that Hezbollah had launched rockets from Qana.

“We found no evidence of Hezbollah fighters in Qana,” Kassem Shaulan, a 28-year-old medic and training manager for the Red Cross in Tyre told IPS at their headquarters. “When we rescue people or recover bodies from villages, we usually see rocket launchers or Hezbollah fighters if they are there, but in Qana I can say that the village was 100 percent clear of

either of those.”

Another Red Cross worker, 32-year-old Mohammad Zatar, told IPS that “we can tell when Hezbollah has been firing rockets from certain areas, because all of the people run away, on foot if they have to.”

While IPS was interviewing people in Qana at the site of the shelter Monday, Israeli warplanes roared overhead. Vibrations from nearby bombing rattled many buildings. At least three villages in southern Lebanon were attacked in Israeli air strikes Monday.

Following the international outcry over the air strike, Israel declared a 48-hour cessation of air strikes in order to carry out a military probe into the Qana killings.

Despite the false Israeli statement that it was halting its air strikes, Israeli Justice Minister Haim Ramon told Army Radio that the stoppage “does not signify in any way the end to the war.”

Israel has rejected mounting international pressure to end the 20-day-old war against Hezbollah. The United Nations has indefinitely postponed a meeting on a new peacekeeping force for southern Lebanon.

While defending the Israeli air strike on the civilians in Qana, Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman told the UN Security Council that Qana was “a hub for Hezbollah”, and said that Israel had urged villagers to leave.

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said in reply to questions in New York Monday that the bombing was “totally, totally its (Hezbollah’s) fault.”

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