



## **LEBANON: “THE SKY RAINED MISSILES”**

**ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES IN LEBANON MUST BE  
INVESTIGATED AS WAR CRIMES**

RESEARCH  
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*Damaged buildings stand near the rubble of Nabatieh municipality building, which was destroyed in multiple Israeli airstrikes on 16 October 2024 on November 8, 2024 in Nabatieh, southern Lebanon. © Ed Ram/Getty Images*

As part of its ongoing investigation into violations of the laws of war in Lebanon, Amnesty International has documented four illustrative cases in which unlawful Israeli strikes killed at least 49 civilians. These attacks must be investigated as war crimes.

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its ongoing investigation into violations of the laws of war in Lebanon, Amnesty International has documented four illustrative cases in which unlawful Israeli strikes killed at least 49 civilians. These attacks must be investigated as war crimes.

Israeli forces struck three residential buildings in the village of al-Ain in northern Bekaa on 29 September, in the village of Aitou in northern Lebanon on 14 October, and in Baalbeck city on 21 October, decimating entire families. Additionally, on 16 October Israeli forces attacked the municipal headquarters of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon.

The Israeli military did not issue warnings ahead of any of these strikes.

The organization found that the Israeli attacks on al-Ain, Baalbeck city, and the Nabatieh municipality were likely direct attacks on civilians or on civilian objects, as the organization did not find evidence of military targets at any of these locations at the time of the attacks. However, even if Israeli forces intended to strike what they considered to be legitimate military objectives, the means and methods of these attacks, using large bombs on populated civilian buildings at times of day when they would have been known to be full of civilians, and without any prior warning, would likely make them indiscriminate attacks, and hence unlawful. The attack on a residential building in Aitou, which in addition to killing 23 civilians, killed one person who may have been a Hezbollah operative, was likely an indiscriminate attack and potentially a disproportionate attack.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Amnesty International interviewed 35 survivors and witnesses, surveyed the locations of three of the strikes, visited a hospital where the wounded from one of the attacks received treatment, photographed remnants of the munitions used in the attacks for expert identification, verified dozens of videos and photographic material obtained from local sources and available on social media, and examined satellite imagery of the locations.

On November 11, Amnesty International's International Secretariat requested information from the Israeli authorities seeking clarification about the military objectives targeted at these locations and what precautions were taken to avoid or minimize the risk of causing civilian casualties, but did not receive a response prior to publication.

## 3. UNLAWFUL STRIKES BY ISRAELI FORCES

### 3.1 NABATIEH MUNICIPALITY STRIKE

**"We could see with our own eyes how the sky rained missiles ... The two-story municipality building was reduced to a pile of cement. Smoke and fires broke out in cars that were nearby... There were body parts and torn bodies. I saw the body of Dr. Ahmad Koheil at the entrance to the municipal building."**

Mohamad Soleiman, a paramedic and head of the Nabatieh Ambulance Association

At around 10:00 am local time on 16 October 2024, an Israeli air strike hit the municipal headquarters of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon, killing 11 civilians, including the mayor, and injuring at least three other civilians.

The air strike took place without prior warning, just as the municipality's crisis unit was meeting to coordinate deliveries of aid, including food, water and medicines, to residents and internally displaced people who had fled to the city from other parts of southern Lebanon that had come under attack. Following the strike, the Israeli military stated that its forces attacked dozens of Hezbollah targets in the Nabatieh area. Amnesty International did not find any evidence of a military target at the municipal headquarters at the time of the attack.

This was the second direct Israeli air strike on a Lebanese government municipality building since cross-border hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah began on 8 October 2023.

The air strike killed the mayor, Ahmad Koheil, municipal council member Sadek Ismail, as well as municipality employees Mohamad Bitar, Mohamad Zahri, Kassem Hijazi and Fadl Awadah. Other civilians killed were Haytham Mishlib, Ali Bitar, Ahmad Ali Bitar, Faysal Fakih and Ragheb Jaber, who were at the municipal headquarters to receive aid or volunteer to deliver aid. The air strike also injured at least three people, including Khodr Kodeih, another municipal council member, and Abbas Fahd, a paramedic who was volunteering with the municipality's crisis unit.

Around two hours after the strike, the Israeli military's Arabic spokesperson issued a statement on X (formerly Twitter) announcing that the Israeli air force had launched a series of attacks targeting dozens of Hezbollah targets in the Nabatieh area, including "military buildings, military command headquarters, and weapons depots."

Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab verified three videos and 12 images showing the aftermath of the strike and analyzed satellite images of the location before and after the strike. They all confirmed destruction of the building that was consistent with an air strike. Videos and images taken after the strike show a large pile of rubble where the municipal building once stood, destroyed vehicles and civil defence teams carrying out rescue efforts. The videos do not show evidence of military targets or equipment in the building, consistent with the interviewees' statements, and the scale of the damage indicates that the ordnance used was likely a large aerial bomb.



*Satellite imagery shows the Nabatieh municipality building on 15 October 2024 at 0628 UTC. On 16 October at 0706 UTC, satellite imagery shows the building is not visible and there is a large amount of smoke rising from the area. The image appears to have been captured just after the airstrike. © Planet Labs PBC*

The Nabatieh municipality building is situated in the heart of Nabatieh city, in the middle of its commercial centre and historic Ottoman-era market, which was destroyed in an Israeli attack on 13 October 2024. The Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for the city on 3 October, but municipal council member Khodr Kodeih, who survived the attack, and other interviewees told Amnesty International many residents could not flee or chose not to.

Municipal council member Khodr Kodeih, who was injured in the attack, said the crisis unit had convened at the municipal headquarters because its location in Nabatieh's commercial centre gave residents coming to collect aid a sense of security.

Khodr Kodeih sustained injuries including burns and fractures in his pelvic area, back, and left leg. He told Amnesty International how within seconds of arriving at the municipal building everything around him "turned into fire, smoke, dust and screams". "I was covered with rubble. I remained conscious and heard Abbas Fahd's voice. He was next to me. I said to him, be patient. I did not lose consciousness, but I could not move. Minutes felt like years," he said.

Abbas Fahd, a paramedic, was also injured in the attack. He told Amnesty International:

**"We were preparing an ambulance with food supplies to distribute, when we heard the roar of a warplane.... It was only fractions of a second before everything turned into a disaster around us, I did not hear an explosion, but I found myself under the rubble...."**

Mohamad Soleiman, a paramedic and head of the Nabatieh Ambulance Association, described how he saw warplanes suddenly raiding the city, turning the sky into "a cloud of smoke and flying stones":

**"We could see with our own eyes how the sky rained missiles ... The two-story municipality building was reduced to a pile of cement. Smoke and fires broke out in cars that were nearby.... There were body parts and torn bodies. I saw the body of Dr. Ahmad Koheil at the entrance to the municipal building."**

Interviewees told Amnesty International that there were no military personnel or vehicles in or around the municipal building. The Israeli authorities did not respond to Amnesty International's request for information.

This air strike was likely a direct attack on civilians or on civilian objects or an indiscriminate attack and must be investigated as a war crime.

## **3.2 AL-SHAAR FAMILY STRIKE**

On 29 September, approximately at 4:50 am local time, an Israeli strike on the outskirts of the village of al-Ain in northern Bekaa destroyed the house of the Syrian al-Shaar family, killing all nine members sleeping in the house. The air strike, carried out without warning, killed construction worker Reslan Hassan al-Shaar, his wife Ibtissam Abdelkarim, and his four children: Rassoul, 28, Bilal, 27, Alaa, 17, and Ali, 12. The strike also killed Rassoul's wife, Elaf, and their two children, Reslan, seven, and Hawraa 12.

Ibrahim al-Shaar, the only surviving family member who was not home that night, told Amnesty International that he had no idea why his house was hit.

Israeli authorities have not published any statements providing an explanation for this strike. Amnesty International interviewed three residents of al-Ain village, as well as Youssef Jaafar, the mukhtar (local official) of the village, who were acquainted with al-Shaar family who all confirmed that those killed were civilians.

The local official told Amnesty International the family had lived in the village for years. "Abou Rassoul's parents used to make and sell home-made sweets. [...] This is a civilian house, there is no military target in it whatsoever. It is full of kids. This family is well-known in town," he said.

Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab verified a video showing an excavator and a bulldozer removing rubble in the immediate aftermath of the strike. Satellite imagery analysis confirms that the al-Shaar family home was destroyed by an air strike between 28 and 29 September.



*Satellite imagery from 21 May 2024 shows the al-Shaar family house in al-Ain, Bekaa, Lebanon. On 30 September 2024, the building is completely destroyed with burn marks on the ground from the blast. Scraping is visible in the debris area, aligning with videos showing excavators present after the strike. Lower resolution imagery (not shown) confirms the building was destroyed between 28 September at 0831 UTC and 29 September at 0744 UTC. © Planet Labs PBC © 2024 Maxar Technologies*

The Israeli authorities did not respond to Amnesty International’s request for information.

Given that all those killed in the attack were civilians and that Amnesty international did not find any indication of the presence of military objectives in the vicinity, this raises serious concerns that the strike on al-Shaar family’s house was a direct attack on civilians and civilian objects. This strike should be investigated as a war crime. Even if Israeli forces believed that they were targeting military objective in the vicinity, the evident lack of feasible precautions in the attack would likely render this an indiscriminate attack.

### **3.3 STRIKE ON DISPLACED FAMILY IN AITOU**

Between 1 and 2 pm on 14 October 2024, an Israeli air strike hit and completely destroyed a four-floor building in the village of Aitou in the Zgharta district of the Northern governorate in Lebanon killing 23 civilians. The house belonged to Elie Alwan, a Maronite Christian resident of the town, who had rented the house to internally displaced people from the village of Aitaroun, in south Lebanon, which had come under heavy Israeli bombardment and had received several evacuation warnings from the Israeli military, including one on 1 October 2024.

The strike killed 23 civilians, as well as Ahmad Fakih, the man presumed by those staying in the house to be the target. The youngest victim was Aline, a five-month-old baby who was flung from the house into a pick-up truck nearby and was found by rescue workers the day after the strike. The strike also injured six people – five displaced people who were staying at the house, as well as the elderly mother of Elie Alwan who lived in the house next door.



*A photo showing children's schoolbooks amidst the rubble following an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in the village of Aito, Zgharta District, North Governorate, Lebanon, on 14 October 2024.  
© Amnesty International*

The Israeli military did not comment on the strike and who or what it was targeting in the village of Aitou, deep in Lebanon's Christian heartland and more than 115 kilometres away from the border with Israel. Amnesty International researchers visited the site of the strike and reviewed the list of those killed and wounded in the attack. Researchers saw children's books, toys, clothes and cooking utensils among the rubble where the house once stood.

Amnesty International interviewed three relatives of the family who had sought refuge in the house in Aitou as well as two survivors, Hussein Issa and Jinane Hijazi, whose 11-month-old child, Ruqayya Issa, was killed in the attack.

Hussein and Jinane said that they had arrived in Aitou around two weeks before the strike with several members of Jinane's family, including her parents, her three siblings, their spouses and their children. They said they believed that the Israelis had targeted Ahmad Fakhri, their neighbour in Aitaroun whom they believed was affiliated with Hezbollah – though they did not know what his role in the group was. They said that due to his perceived affiliation with Hezbollah, the Hijazi family had only allowed his wife, wife's mother and 17-year-old son to stay in the house on the condition that Ahmad Fakhri does not visit. The family said that Ahmad Fakhri's brother was killed in an airstrike in the city of Tyre in southern Lebanon the week before the strike in Aitou.

Hussein and Jinane told Amnesty International that around lunch time on 14 October, Ahmad Fakhri drove up to the house. The young couple panicked and called Hussein's brother, telling him that they were going to leave the house in case Ahmad Fakhri was indeed a target. Both Hussein's brother and his father, who was present in the room with the brother at the time of the call, confirmed this to Amnesty International. Jinane said that her parents convinced them to have lunch before they left, but around 15 minutes after Ahmad Fakhri arrived the house was struck.

"I've lost everything, my entire family, my parents, my siblings, my daughter. I wish I had died that day too," Jinane said.

Researchers found a fragment of the munition at the site of the attack, which, based upon its size and shape and the scalloped edges of the heavy metal casing, an Amnesty International weapon investigator identified as most likely a Mk-80 series aerial bomb, and between 500 and 2000 pounds. The United States is the primary supplier of these types of munition to Israel.

The Israeli authorities did not respond to Amnesty International's request for information.

If Ahmad Fakhri was a lawful military target and was indeed the target of the attack, there were likely many other opportunities to target him when he was not in a house full of civilians. In this case, the attack likely would be an indiscriminate attack that failed to distinguish between civilian and military objectives. Even if there was no other way for Israel to carry out this strike, the attack may have been disproportionate given the presence of a large number of civilians at the time of the strike. Launching an indiscriminate attack that kills or injures civilians and launching an attack in the knowledge that it will cause excessive incidental civilian loss, injury or damage are war crimes.

### 3.4 STRIKE ON THE HOUSE OF OTHMAN FAMILY IN BAALBECK CITY

**“My son woke me up; he was thirsty and wanted to drink. I gave him water and he went back to sleep, hugging his brother. [...] When he hugged his brother, I smiled and thought, I’ll tell his father how our son is when he comes back. I went to pray, and then everything around me exploded. A gas canister exploded, burning my feet, and within seconds, it consumed my kids’ room.”**

Fatima Draï, mother of two boys who were killed in an Israeli airstrike on the house of the Othman family in Baalbeck.

On 21 October 2024, at around 5:45 am local time, an Israeli strike on the neighborhood of al-Nabi Inaam in the city of Baalbeck, the capital of the Baalbeck-Hermel governorate, destroyed a building housing 13 members of the Othman family. The strike, carried out with no warning, killed six women and children and injured the seven others.

Amnesty International reviewed a list of all those present in the house at the time of the attack, all of whom it found to be civilians.

Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab verified 38 images and 10 videos shared on social media and privately by local residents showing the aftermath of the attack. Two verified images and one video taken in the immediate aftermath of the attack show flames burning inside the targeted building, and a video taken hours after the attack shows the fire still burning on the ground floor. The images and videos show that the small two-story building located on a narrow street in a densely populated neighbourhood, sustained heavy damage, including collapsed walls and two round holes in the ceiling, likely caused by the impact of two strikes. The videos and images also show damage to the street and a neighbouring building. Satellite imagery captured on 8 November 2024 (not shown), confirms the damage to the roof of the building.

The Israeli authorities have not published any statements about the strike and did not respond to Amnesty International's request for information.





*Photo from 12 November 2024 showing the damaged house of the Othman family in the city of Baalbeck in Lebanon, as a result of an Israeli airstrike on the house on 21 October 2024. © Amnesty International*

Banin Othman, who lost her 17-year-old year-old daughter in the strike, told Amnesty International that a weapon pierced through the room in which she slept with her children and landed in the living room downstairs, where her aunt, Amira, was praying. [Another] weapon hit a gas canister, igniting a fire in the room where her sister-in-law Fatima and her children were sleeping. She told Amnesty International:

**“We left our homes in the less secure areas [elsewhere in Baalbeck] [...] and moved to my family’s house, which had sheltered us safely during the July 2006 war without any harm. We were sure it was the safest place in Baalbeck. [...] I felt the missiles pass overhead. Then the ground collapsed beneath me. I wondered if I had died. [...] I started suffocating and losing consciousness when I felt hands pulling me out. I asked them to help my children and my sister, who were near me. I blacked out and woke up hours later in the hospital,” she told Amnesty International. “What military targets are they talking about? If there were military targets here, would we bring in our money, our children, and everything we own and put ourselves in danger?”**

Fatima Draï, who lost her two sons, Hassan, 5 and Hussein, 3, in the attack, told Amnesty International:

**“My son woke me up; he was thirsty and wanted to drink. I gave him water and he went back to sleep, hugging his brother. [...] When he hugged his brother, I smiled and thought, I’ll tell his father how our son is when he comes back. I went to pray, and then everything around me exploded. A gas canister exploded, burning my feet, and within seconds, it consumed my kids’ room.”**

Hala Othman, who was injured in the attack, told Amnesty International that she remembers lying on the ground with her children above her head trying to wake her up with primitive forms of first aid. She said:

**“I did not immediately comprehend what had happened. My head was shaking and my eyes were only seeing shadows. After a while, I saw them pulling a woman from under the rubble and brought her into our house. It was Fatima, the mother of the two killed children. She was delirious and asking, ‘Where are my children? Where are my children? I can’t hear their voices.’ She was covered in dust and covered in her own blood. It was heartbreaking.**

Ali Othman, a mukhtar (local official) in Baalbeck, confirmed to Amnesty International that all those present in the house at the time of attack are civilians who are well-known to everyone.

“This strike targeted the house of a very modest and well-known family. These family members fled their neighborhoods, which were previously bombed, and sought refuge in the old family home, which was considered the safest place.”

Hussein Othman, a former member of the municipality of Baalbeck who is also acquainted with the family, told Amnesty International, “The family was not involved in any military activity, and the target was clearly a civilian home, far from any military objective.”

Amnesty International’s research has found no evidence of military targets in the Othman family’s house or in the immediate vicinity at the time of the attack. The strike is likely a direct attack on civilians and on civilian objects, and must be investigated as a war crime.

## **4. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL OBLIGATIONS**

The principle of distinction, a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law, requires parties to distinguish at all times between military objectives and civilians or civilian objects, and to direct their attacks only at military objectives.

In addition to prohibiting attacks directed at civilians or at civilian objects, international humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate attacks, meaning those that are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.

International humanitarian law also prohibits disproportionate attacks, which are those which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

In order to avoid indiscriminate, disproportionate or other unlawful attacks, parties must respect the principle of precaution, which requires parties to a conflict to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including by taking all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, incidental harm to civilians and damage to civilian objects. This includes doing everything feasible to verify that targets are military objectives, to assess the proportionality of attacks, and to halt attacks if it becomes apparent, they are wrongly directed or disproportionate. And parties must give effective advance warning of attacks which may affect the civilian population, unless circumstances do not permit.

Parties must choose appropriate means and methods of attack when military targets are located within residential areas. The use of explosive weapons with wide area effects on targets located in densely populated civilian areas is likely to result in indiscriminate or other unlawful attacks. Choosing methods of attack that do not minimize the risk to civilians – for example, attacking objectives at times when many civilians are most likely to be present – also is contrary to international humanitarian law. Parties must also take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks. For Hezbollah and other armed groups, this includes avoiding, to the extent feasible, locating military objectives and fighters within or near densely populated areas.

Attacking civilians who are not taking a direct part in hostilities, or targeting civilian objects constitute war crimes. Launching an indiscriminate attack resulting in death or injury of civilians and conducting an attack in the knowledge that it will cause excessive incidental civilian loss, injury or damage to civilians also constitute war crimes.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Israeli airstrikes on three residential buildings in the village of al-Ain in northern Bekaa on 29 September, in the village of Aitou in northern Lebanon on 14 October, in Baalbeck city on 21 October, as well as the Israeli airstrike on the municipal headquarters of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon on 16 October, which killed at least 49 civilians and decimated entire families in Lebanon, must be investigated as war crimes.

Amnesty International issues the following recommendations:

- Israel must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects as well as indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, and they must take all feasible precautions in planning and carrying out attacks to avoid, or in any event minimize, harm to civilians and civilian objects.
- All states, especially the United States, must immediately suspend all arms transfers and other forms of military assistance to Israel due to the significant risk that these weapons could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international law.
- The Lebanese government should urgently request that the United Nations Human Rights Council hold a special session to address the violations that have occurred and continue to occur in Lebanon as a matter of urgency and to propose a resolution that establishes an independent investigative mechanism to address violations of international humanitarian law committed in connection with the hostilities in between Hezbollah and Israel.
- The Lebanese government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should seriously reconsider providing the International Criminal Court (ICC) with the jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute crimes within the Rome Statute (war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide) committed on Lebanese territory since October 2023.

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