

## Refugee Review Tribunal

### AUSTRALIA

#### RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

**Research Response Number:** LBN31053  
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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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#### Questions

**1. Given the events/developments in Lebanon this year, is there any evidence that Hezbollah's attitude towards Beirut-based families of senior ex-SLA members, still in Israel, has changed?**

#### RESPONSE

##### Summary:

No reports were found of actual violence committed by Hezbollah against Beirut based family members of former senior South Lebanese Army (SLA) since the recent conflict. Reports alleging that Hezbollah had threatened with violence former SLA members and their families living in southern Lebanon were found: a small group of former SLA members and their families who crossed into Israel alleged fear of attacks and threats from Hezbollah. Furthermore, SLA members living in northern Israel from 2000 who gave interviews during the recent crisis protected their identities from a fear that harm would be perpetrated against relatives still living in Lebanon. Former SLA members were monitored by Hezbollah during the recent conflict, and arrests by Lebanese and Hezbollah security forces of former SLA members living in Beirut suspected of spying or assisting Israel did occur.

The recent conflict between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) occurred between 12 July and 14 August 2006. A small group of former SLA members and their families who crossed into Israel from Lebanon on 24 August 2006 reportedly did so from a fear of "revenge attacks" and "threats" from Hezbollah. Two news reports refer to this event:

Lebanese Tied To Israel-Allied Militia Seek Israeli Refuge

A group of Lebanese relatives of former members of an Israeli-allied militia crossed into Israel Thursday night, **seeking refuge from possible revenge attacks by Hezbollah** in the wake of the latest fighting between the Islamic guerillas and Israeli forces.

Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz ordered the small group of civilians, among them a child, to be allowed across the northern Israel border and receive humanitarian aid while their case is examined, a ministry spokeswoman said. She gave no further details, but the Haaretz daily said on its Web site that 13 people had crossed.

Many members of the South Lebanon Army and their dependents, around 6,000 in all, fled to Israel in 2000, when the Israeli army pulled out of south Lebanon after an 18-year occupation. Around 2,500 are reported to have remained in Israel and become naturalized citizens ('Lebanese tied to Israel-allied militia seek Israeli refuge', 2006, *Dow Jones Commodities Service*, 25 August – Attachment 1).

Offering more details is a second report from the Israeli Ynetnews.com website. It states explicitly that Hezbollah had threatened with physical harm family members of former SLA personnel. The news item concludes by "estimating" that families of former SLA members living in south Lebanon had been threatened since the ceasefire date on 14 August 2006:

Hizbullah 'settles score' with SLA families

**Eight Lebanese family members, former SLA members**, arrive at northern border next to Metula Thursday, request to enter Israel **following Hizbullah threats to hurt them**. Defense minister instructs IDF to grant them entry, but until now, only one allowed to cross border

Drama on the northern border: Eight family members from Lebanon, former members of the Southern Lebanese Army, arrived Thursday afternoon within 10 meters of the border next to Metula and requested IDF authorization to enter into Israel **following Hizbullah threats to cause them physical harm. It turns out that this is a real phenomenon in which Hizbullah members threaten family members of former SLA members.**

Defense Minister Amir Peretz instructed the IDF to grant the family members entry into Israel and ordered to offer them humanitarian aid, until their situation and the circumstances of their flight from Lebanon are examined. However, as of now, the eight have yet to gain entry into Israel.

An IDF force on the northern border reported the presence of the Lebanese refugees on the border to the commanders of the Northern Command and to the Kiryat Shmona police station. As of now, it has been decided that the issue will be handled only by the IDF. Some of the family members felt unwell because of the intense heat in the area, and residents of Metulla transferred bottles of cold water to them by way of the IDF.

Towards Thursday evening, one of the family members, who was severely wounded in his limbs and face 10 years ago when Hizbullah inserted explosives in his belongings, was brought into Israeli territory. This incident occurred while the man was collaborating with Israel.

A few days ago a 30 year-old Lebanese woman crossed the security fence in the Metula area along with her three children to reunite with her husband, a former SLA member who left Lebanon with the IDF's withdrawal from the country in May 2000. Following an IDF interrogation the woman spent a few hours at the Kiryat Shmona police station, where it was

determined that she had no intention of carrying out an attack in Israel. The husband was eventually located and met with his family later that night.

**It is estimated that families of former SLA members residing in south Lebanon have been subject to repeated threats of physical violence since the ceasefire came into effect** (Einav, H. 2006, 'Hizbullah 'settles score' with SLA families', *Ynetnews.com* website, 24 August <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3295510,00.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006 – Attachment 2).

One of the former SLA members who crossed into Israel was later interviewed on 9 September 2006. He declined to give his real name and is reported as stating that he “feared Hezbollah Shiite militants would kill him...[and] had to leave to save our lives” (‘Lebanese family asks for Israeli asylum’, 2006, *Agence France Presse*, 9 September – Attachment 3).

Former SLA members and their families already living in northern Israel were also interviewed in July 2006 by news agencies for their opinion on the conflict. These families refrained from stating their names, location in Israel, or hometown in Lebanon for “fear of retribution on relatives”. They also expressed a fear of telephoning their families in Lebanon believing that their calls would be intercepted (Farrel, S. & Abu Toameh, M. 2006, ‘Reviled, cut off and bombed: the Lebanese ‘traitors’ in Israel’, 18 July, *Times Online* website <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,251-2274934,00.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006 – Attachment 4; Finer, J. 2006, ‘Views Complicated By Dual Loyalties Lebanese Who Fought Alongside Israel Watch New Conflict on Familiar Terrain’, 22 July, *Washington Post Foreign Service* website <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/21/AR2006072101544.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006 – Attachment 5). One former SLA member living in the town of Nahariya in northern Israel declared that relatives of former SLA members had always lived in constant fear and that violence could be committed against them in the future under certain conditions:

Q. Are you in contact with your family back home?

A. Not now. Before the war it was difficult. We would speak via a connection in Cyprus. But now there’s nothing. They have a difficult life. There is no work. **Under the rule of Hezbollah and Syria, anyone who was a relative of an SLA soldier – especially those with family in Israel – lived in constant fear. Who knows how they’re doing now? There’s a fear that if Hezbollah thinks it’s the end, things will get violent for the families that support Israel and oppose terror** (Mitnick, J. 2006, ‘Lebanese exile watches the war from inside Israel’ 30 July, *The Star-Ledger* – Attachment 6).

Another news article of July 28 2006 cites a Lebanese security official stating that Hezbollah’s security branch monitored former SLA soldiers in Lebanon. In addition, arrests of former SLA members who were suspected of collaborating, informing, spying or in any way assisting Israel took place in late July 2006. These arrests were conducted by Lebanese security forces and Hezbollah, and took place in Beirut among other places. The total number of arrests is said to have been 70:

Six years ago, Fouad spent his days in southern Lebanon fighting the guerrillas of Hezbollah. Now, he spends his nights finding cover from their rockets in an underground bomb shelter in this northern Israeli town, a Lebanese Shia Muslim living in exile in Israel and wishing he were back fighting his old enemy face to face.

“Hezbollah is a cancer,” he said, sitting in the stale air of air raid shelter No. 399.

Fouad is a former senior officer in the South Lebanese Army, a mainly Christian Lebanese militia supported by Israel during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon.

When Israel withdrew its forces in 2000, many SLA soldiers and their families fled to Israel before they could be captured by Hezbollah. **Like many SLA men, he has family still living in the south of Lebanon and so declined to give his family name for fear Hezbollah would harm them.**

**He's wise to be cautious: A Lebanese security official told Newsday yesterday that Hezbollah's security branch has been monitoring many former SLA soldiers in Lebanon, especially those who returned to their villages after the withdrawal.**

**In the past two weeks, Lebanese security forces, working with Hezbollah's security branch, have arrested more than 50 people – in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley and Beirut – suspected of spying for Israel, the security official said. About 20 were former members of the SLA, he said, and some had served prison terms after the withdrawal for belonging to the SLA.**

...”All the SLA guys are willing to work together to go back and finish the job.”

Unlike many of the young Israeli soldiers, he said, he knows the territory north of the border intimately. He could point out to the Israelis where they might be ambushed, which village is which, what Hezbollah's tactics might be.

So far, though, the Israeli army has not come knocking at Fouad's door. **He keeps in touch with a few other former SLA fighters, who are spread out in towns mainly in the north of Israel, but their network has largely broken up in the past six years.** They have integrated into Israeli society. Fouad's four children barely speak Arabic now, having been educated in Israeli schools (McAllester, M. 2006 'From exile, he's eager to fight', Newsday.com website, 28 July <http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/world/ny-wosla284831775jul28,0,2765283.story?coll=ny-worldnews-toputility> – Accessed 8 December 2006 – Attachment 7).

Two brief news reports on the arrest of SLA members are also attached:

- 'Lebanon arrests 50 suspected of spying for Israel', 2006, *Reuters News*, 26 July – Attachment 8.
- 'Hezbollah TV reports on arrests of "collaborators"', 2006, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 29 July – Attachment 9.

General assessments on the country situation in Lebanon following the conflict are provided in a 20 September 2006 *Operational Guidance Note* on Lebanon compiled by the UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate, as well as a 27 September 2006 *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report* on Lebanon for the United States Congress. The former report includes an assessment of the claims of SLA members presented to the Office but without specific reference to events of the July-August 2006 conflict. The latter report includes a summary of Hezbollah activities immediately following the recent hostilities and refers to its enhanced status in the country (UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate 2006, *Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon*, 20 September, Section 3.5 & 3.13, UK Home Office website <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogms/lebanon?view=Binary> - Attachment 10; Congressional Research Service (CRS) 2006, *CRS Report for*

Congress – Lebanon, 27 September, US Embassy in Italy website, pp.19-20  
<http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/RL33509.pdf> – Accessed 8 December 2006 – Attachment 11)

Hezbollah's attitudes to former SLA members one year prior to the July-August 2006 conflict were reported on during debate on a proposed bill of amnesty for former members of the SLA. Hezbollah rejected the proposal based in part on their belief that former SLA men were still on the Israeli payroll and that such an amnesty would encourage a rebuilding of SLA networks. The newspaper report on the amnesty also stated that such a law was unlikely to protect those SLA soldiers involved in the *al Khiam* prison and now living in Israel:

Some 2,400 former militiamen and their families still live in Israel. Most, but not all, of them are Christians who comprised the **hard core of the SLA and its feared intelligence apparatus**. It is difficult to imagine that most of them would want to return to their former homes in South Lebanon, even if they are granted amnesty by the government. **An amnesty law would not protect the likes of the Saleh siblings, who as Shiite SLA intelligence officers instituted a brutal regime in their home village of Ait al-Shaab, a bastion of Hizbullah support during the occupation. The same applies to those involved in maintaining the Khiam detention center. Hizbullah has “named and shamed” the prison guards, interrogators and other personnel on a plaque at the entrance.** Would any of them really risk returning to South Lebanon? ('The quandary of an SLA amnesty', 2005, *The Daily Star*, 15 August – Attachment 12).

The most recent UK Home Office Report found which refers to families of SLA members is dated February 2004. It stated the following:

#### **South Lebanon Army (SLA) and Accused or Actual Collaborators**

...Acts of Retribution

6.53...There are no known reports of violent acts of retaliation against suspected 'collaborators' or their families attributed to members of Hizbollah or Amal. Hizbollah handed over former SLA militiamen and suspected 'collaborators' they detained to the Lebanese Army or gendarmerie. In spite of certain threatening and inflammatory remarks by Hizbollah leaders, it is evident that former SLA members, their families or others accused of 'collaboration', are not at risk of violent retribution from Hizbollah or other armed organisations in Lebanon. However, Hizbollah's stated position is that such people should surrender themselves to the Lebanese authorities to face trial

6.54 There have been sporadic attacks by unknown assailants against former members of the SLA, since the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000. In 2003, there were bomb attacks on former SLA member's property resulting in damage to the property and, in at least one case, minor injuries to a member of the former SLA member's family (UK Home Office 2004, *Country Information Bulletin – Lebanon*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website, February <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RSDCOI&id=41542e8b4> – Accessed 18 December – Attachment 13).

In November 2003, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC) sought expert advice on the influence of Hezbollah in Beirut from a professor at the Centre for Advanced Studies on Modern Asia and Africa in Paris. This advice and the IRBC research stated the following on Hezbollah and the SLA in Beirut

Those who would normally be targeted by the Hizbollah are normally those who, like former members of the **South Lebanese Army (SLA)**, have closely cooperated with the Israeli armed forces during the Israel's occupation of South Lebanon and may have committed human rights violations, including torture, against occupation opponents. When the Israelis removed their troops from South Lebanon, the Lebanese authorities recognized the principle that those who had collaborated with Israel during the occupation should be prosecuted. There were also reprisals from the Hizbollah and some people were even murdered. **However, to the knowledge of the professor, there have been no reports of this type of reprisal since at least the middle of 2002. Some former members of the ALS [sic] have recently returned to Lebanon from Israel but, in 80 % of the cases, only after they have obtained guaranties of their safety through connections with their families, religious community, clan or other ties in their local communities of origin.**

The professor had no knowledge of any report of Hizbollah reprisals against other categories of people, including those who resist recruitment in the organization or disagree with its objectives and policies. He also said that some might be safer in other areas of Beirut where Hizbollah's presence is less pervasive, Christian neighbourhoods for instance. **However, if a person is really on a Hizbollah target list, that person would find it difficult to avoid the organization no matter where in Beirut or elsewhere in Lebanon that person went** (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, LBN42130.E – *Lebanon: Update to LBN31560 of 8 April 1999 on the influence of Hizbollah in Beirut and on whether state protection is available to individuals fearing Hizbollah in Beirut*, November – Accessed 18 December 2006 – Attachment 14)

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

#### **Government Information & Reports**

UK Home Office <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Embassy in Italy website <http://www.usembassy.it/>

#### **International News & Politics**

Ynetnews.com website <http://www.ynetnews.com/>

Times Online website <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

Washington Post Foreign Service website <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

Newsday.com website <http://www.newsday.com/>

#### **Search Engines**

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

#### **Online Subscription Services**

### Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. 'Lebanese tied to Israel-allied militia seek Israeli refuge', 2006, *Dow Jones Commodities Service*, 25 August. (FACTIVA)

2. Einav, H. 2006, 'Hizbullah 'settles score' with SLA families', *Ynetnews.com* website, 24 August <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3295510,00.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006.
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4. Farrel, S. & Abu Toameh, M. 2006, 'Reviled, cut off and bombed: the Lebanese 'traitors' in Israel', 18 July, *Times Online* website <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,251-2274934,00.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006.
5. Finer, J. 2006, 'Views complicated by dual loyalties lebanese who fought alongside israel watch new conflict on familiar terrain', 22 July, *Washington Post Foreign Service* website <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/21/AR2006072101544.html> – Accessed 7 December 2006.
6. Mitnick, J. 2006, 'Lebanese exile watches the war from inside Israel' 30 July, *The Star-Ledger*. (FACTIVA)
7. McAllester, M. 2006 'From exile, he's eager to fight', *Newsday.com* website, 28 July <http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/world/ny-wosla284831775jul28.0,2765283.story?coll=ny-worldnews-toputility> – Accessed 8 December 2006.
8. 'Lebanon arrests 50 suspected of spying for Israel', 2006, *Reuters News*, 26 July. (FACTIVA)
9. 'Hezbollah TV reports on arrests of "collaborators"', 2006, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 29 July. (FACTIVA)
10. UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate 2006, *Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon*, 20 September, UK Home Office website <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogons/lebanon?view=Binary> .
11. Congressional Research Service (CRS) 2006, *CRS Report for Congress – Lebanon*, 27 September, US Embassy in Italy website, <http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/RL33509.pdf> – Accessed 8 December 2006.
12. 'The quandary of an SLA amnesty', 2005, *The Daily Star*, 15 August. (CISNET Israel CX131291)
13. UK Home Office 2004, *Country Information Bulletin – Lebanon*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website, February <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RSDCOI&id=41542e8b4> – Accessed 18 December.

14. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, *LBN42130.E – Lebanon: Update to LBN31560 of 8 April 1999 on the influence of Hizbollah in Beirut and on whether state protection is available to individuals fearing Hizbollah in Beirut*, November – Accessed 18 December 2006.