

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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20 April 2012

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Lebanon and Israel: Treatment of Lebanese who cooperated with Israel during its occupation of Lebanon, including those who stayed in Lebanon after the withdrawal of Israeli troops and those who sought refuge in Israel and obtained Israeli citizenship (2000-2012)

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### 1. Background

Two sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that during the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon until May 2000, the Israeli army supported and supplied the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a Lebanese militia (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). Several sources say that the SLA consisted mainly of Christians (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008; Institut MEDEA n.d.). However, Al Jazeera says that the militia was composed mainly of Shi'ite Muslims (26 May 2010).

Sources indicate that, when the Israeli army withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000, approximately 6,000 SLA members and their families found refuge in Israel (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; *The Daily Star* 29 Nov. 2011; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). Sources state it was feared that people associated with the SLA would fall victim to reprisals in Lebanon after the withdrawal of the Israeli army (Al Jazeera 26 May 2010; International Crisis Group 18 Nov. 2002, 7, 17; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). Some sources indicate that possibility of reprisals from Hezbollah was of particular concern (Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008; Institut MEDEA n.d.).

Information on Lebanese without ties to the SLA, but who cooperated with Israel during its occupation of south Lebanon could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### 2. Treatment in Lebanon of Lebanese who Cooperated with Israel

#### 2.1 After Israel's Withdrawal in 2000

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate noted that major acts of retaliation did not develop after Israel's withdrawal (Al Jazeera 26 May 2010; International Crisis Group 18 Nov. 2002, 7, 17). International Crisis Group, however, indicated that there were several incidents of looting (*ibid.*, 7). According to an article published by Middle East Online, a site based in the United Kingdom that covers the news in the Near East, Hezbollah adopted a conciliatory attitude toward SLA members, leaving the courts to deal with them (13 Nov. 2008). According to Al Jazeera, Hezbollah also ordered its members and supporters not to engage in reprisals (26 May 2010). However, according to the BBC, the Hezbollah leader called for a "severe punishment" of those who collaborated with Israel during its occupation (26 May 2000). Human Rights Watch also reported that, in June 2000, twenty men were abducted in south Lebanon and many of them were interrogated by Hezbollah members because of their presumed connections to the SLA (26 June 2000).

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000*, published by the United States Department of State, international observers reported that trials of former SLA personnel were not free and fair, but it did not provide any more details (US 23 Feb. 2001, Introduction). Two sources note that former SLA members received relatively light sentences (International Crisis Group 18 Nov. 2002, 17; *The Daily Star* 1 July 2010). According to International Crisis Group, approximately 2,700 former SLA members were tried after the withdrawal of Israeli troops, and they received sentences ranging from one to three years in prison on average (18 Nov. 2002, 17). The Xinhua news agency also indicates that most of the SLA's former members who returned to Lebanon after their initial escape received sentences of only one or two years in prison, except for those who had killed resistors to the Israeli occupation (22 Sept. 2000). In an article from the Associated Press (AP) published in March 2001, out of a group of 30 people who were convicted for their collaboration with Israel, most received prison sentences ranging from three weeks to three years (AP 3 Mar. 2001). However, AP states that one of the accused, implicated in the death of a Lebanese, was the 15th person to be sentenced to death *in absentia* for actions committed during the Israeli occupation (*ibid.*).

International Crisis Group notes that many people perceived the sentences handed down to those convicted of collaborating with Israel to be too lenient and that some have expressed a fear of reprisals after they have served their time (18 Nov. 2002, 17). Some sources indicate that the courts banned former SLA members from returning to their villages for several years so that their presence did not provoke such retribution (*ibid.*; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008).

## 2.2 In Recent Years

### 2.2.1 Return of Some Former SLA Members

Sources noted that many Lebanese viewed former SLA members as "traitors" (Al Jazeera 26 May 2010; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). Sources also say that many former SLA members have returned to Lebanon over the years (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). According to Middle East Online, most of those who return to Lebanon inform the authorities (13 Nov. 2008). According to Arutz Sheva, an Israeli news site, approximately 2,100 people who sought refuge in Israel in 2000 had returned to Lebanon by 4 August 2009 (4 Aug. 2009).

According to sources, former fighters who return to Lebanon face prison sentences for their collaboration with Israel (AFP 21 May 2010; Middle East Online 13 Nov. 2008). However, according to Agence France-Presse (AFP), those who have returned to Lebanon have [translation] "benefitted from extenuating circumstances and have received sentences of only one or two years' imprisonment" (21 May 2010).

The Lebanese daily newspaper the *Daily Star* notes that many ex-militia fear returning to the country because they fear being sentenced to death or life in prison (1 July 2010). Middle East Online also noted that some Lebanese found it difficult to accept the presence of former SLA members (13 Nov. 2008).

### 2.2.2 Waves of Arrests and Convictions for Espionage and Collaboration

Sources indicated that, in 2009 and 2010, there was a wave of arrests of people suspected of having collaborated with Israel (*The Daily Star* 1 July 2010; AI 12 Feb. 2010). According to *The Daily Star*, dozens of people were arrested because of allegations that they were spying for Israel (1 July 2010). According to some sources, more than 100 people suspected of spying for Israel were arrested in Lebanon between April 2009 and January 2011 (Al-Manar Television 11 Jan. 2011; *The Daily Star* 4 Jan. 2011). According to Amnesty International (AI), although those arrests were carried out mostly by the Lebanese authorities, at least one was carried out by Hezbollah (12 Feb. 2010).

Sources report recent cases of people who have been tried for their collaboration with Israel (*The Daily Star* 20 Mar. 2012; *ibid.* 4 Jan. 2011; Al-Manar Television 11 Jan. 2011; AFP 24 Feb. 2010; *ibid.* 10 Oct. 2010). The *Daily Star* wrote that, in March 2012, Lebanon's military tribunal sentenced a man to death *in absentia* and five others to hard labour for collaborating with Israel (20 March 2012). The daily also indicated that three of the men convicted, including the man who received the death penalty, had continued to collaborate with Israel after the war between Lebanon and Israel, from 2006 to 2009, while the other three had collaborated with Israel before and after the Israeli troops withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000 (*The Daily Star* 20 March 2012). According to another article from *The Daily Star*, five people were sentenced to death for espionage between April 2009 and January 2011, but none of them had been executed (4 Jan. 2011). According to Al-Manar Television, affiliated with Hezbollah, in January 2011, judges called for death sentences against several people accused of spying for Israel (11 Jan. 2011). According to Human Rights Watch, three people were sentenced to death for spying for Israel in 2011 (2012). According to AFP, in February 2010, a Lebanese military prosecutor called for two men to be sentenced to death for allegedly spying for Israel (24 Feb. 2010).

### 2.2.3 Death Sentences for Collaboration and Espionage

Human Rights Watch reports that Lebanon extended its moratorium on executions in 2011 (2012). AFP indicated that Lebanon had not executed anyone since 2004, but that there were "growing calls" from Lebanese politicians for death sentences to be carried out against those convicted of spying for Israel (10 Oct. 2010). Hezbollah called for the death penalty for people arrested for espionage (AFP 1 Mar. 2010; Al-Manar Television 1 July 2010; *The Daily Star* 1 July 2010). The president of Lebanon also stated that he would approve death penalties issued by military tribunals in cases of espionage and collaboration (ibid; AFP 10 Oct. 2010). *The Daily Star* quoted the president as saying that there was a "national will" in the past to issue lenient sentences but that, after the withdrawal of Israeli troops in 2000, "all spying acts and collaboration with Israel should be severely punished" (1 July 2010).

### 2.2.4 Law Allowing Lebanese who Sought Refuge in Israel to Return to Lebanon

In November 2011, the Lebanese parliament adopted a law allowing those who left the country in 2000 to return (*The Jerusalem Post* 4 Nov. 2011; IsraelHayom 3 Nov. 2011; *The Daily Star* 29 Nov. 2011). Israeli media sources reported that, under the law, former SLA members who returned to Lebanon would be arrested at the border, but their family members would not be prosecuted (IsraelHayom 3 Nov. 2011; *The Jerusalem Post* 4 Nov. 2011). According to the daily newspaper the *Jerusalem Post*, the legislation provides a period of one year for former members of the militia to return (4 Nov. 2011). However, IsraelHayom indicates that the law is unclear as to whether it will protect a person who returns to Lebanon after serving in the Israeli army or marrying an Israeli citizen (3 Nov. 2011). According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Hezbollah supported the law (4 Nov. 2011).

*The Daily Star* reported that the government had also considered the possibility of holding new trials, without detention, of former members of the militia who were convicted *in absentia* before 31 December 2005 (29 Nov. 2011). According to that daily, this measure is being considered in order to reassure the Lebanese who fled the country in 2000 and are afraid of returning (*The Daily Star* 29 Nov. 2011). The same source also noted that parliamentarians were also looking to make a distinction between those who were forced to collaborate with Israel and those who deliberately committed acts that violate Lebanese law (ibid.).

## 3. Treatment of Lebanese in Israel who Collaborated with Israel

According to Middle East Online, it was mostly Christian members of the SLA who sought refuge in Israel and settled in the northern part of the country (13 Nov. 2008). According to AFP, some services were established in Israel to help former SLA members, including an office dedicated to them that reports to the prime minister's office (21 May 2010). AFP also reported that, in 2004, former SLA fighters were given the right to acquire Israeli nationality and the status of veterans (ibid.).

However, sources reported that several SLA veterans and their families felt neglected by Israel (AFP 21 May 2010; Haaretz.com 3 Aug. 2009; Ynetnews 17 Aug. 2008). AFP noted that most of them have [translation] "low-skilled jobs in the manufacturing or food industries" (AFP 21 May 2010). According to the minister responsible for the veterans, most of them do not have stable jobs and their incomes are low (Ynetnews 25 Oct. 2009). Middle East Online says "most" former SLA members never felt welcome in Israel (13 Nov. 2008).

Some sources indicated that senior SLA veterans and former regular SLA soldiers receive different kinds of assistance from the Israeli government (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Haaretz.com 3 Aug. 2009; Ynetnews 17 Aug. 2008). Sources note that former high-ranking officials are handled by the Defence Ministry, while other veterans are "shifted from one ministry to the next" (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Haaretz.com 3 August 2009; Ynetnews 17 August 2008). According to some sources, the lowest ranking SLA veterans claimed to have been discriminated against (Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009; Haaretz.com 3 Aug. 2009; Ynetnews 17 Aug. 2008). According to the Israeli news site Ynetnews, some senior SLA members were given "villas," while other veterans received a low monthly stipend for rent (Ynetnews 25 Oct. 2009).

According to some sources, approximately 2,500 former SLA members and their families are still living in Israel (*The Daily Star* 29 Nov. 2011; *The Jerusalem Post* 4 Nov. 2011; Arutz Sheva 4 Aug. 2009). According to Arutz Sheva, the minister responsible for the veterans and their families stated that, in addition to the refugees who returned to Lebanon, approximately 1,500 had dispersed to various other countries (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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