Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: LBN31201
Country: Lebanon
Date: 19 January 2007

Keywords: Lebanon – Hezbollah

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.

Questions

(1) What is the extent of control of the Hezbollah over the villages in the Bekaa Valley?
(2) Does the Hezbollah have a system of conscription or forced recruitment in the areas under its control?
(3) Are there generally reprisals against families or those who do not join the Hezbollah?
(4) What are the parts of sections of Lebanon which are not under the control of the Hezbollah?
(5) Can a Shiite or indeed anyone who lives in a Hezbollah stronghold freely relocate to other parts of Lebanon?

RESPONSE

1. What is the extent of control of the Hezbollah over the villages in the Bekaa Valley?

All of the Bekaa Valley in Southern Lebanon is under the control of Hezbollah, which initially started as a guerrilla movement, following the invasion of Southern Lebanon by Israeli forces in 1982. It is estimated that Hezbollah has more than fifty thousand fighters in Southern Lebanon and in Beirut and has training bases in the Bekaa Valley. The current leader of the movement is Hassan Nasrallah, who transformed the Hezbollah into a major political force in the 2005 elections, where it captured fourteen seats in the one hundred and twenty eight seat Lebanese legislature. Hezbollah remains very popular among Lebanon’s one and a half million Shiites. Hezbollah has established extensive social network throughout the Bekaa Valley. Hezbollah runs a network of schools, clinics and other services and it also controls an array of businesses, including bakeries, banks, factories and an Islamic clothing line, as well as a satellite television station and a radio station. Hezbollah's network of social charity organisations in the Bekaa Valley include social services organisations such as the *Imdad*, which provides educational and medical services to the poor and physically disabled. *Mu'asasat al-Shahid* or the Institution of the Martyr takes care of the welfare of the families of Hezbollah guerrillas who are killed in battle. During the war between the Hezbollah and

(2) Does the Hezbollah have a system of conscription or forced recruitment in the areas under its control?

According to a UK Home Office Report in September 2006, there were no known reports of reprisals against people by Hezbollah, or any accounts of enforced recruitment. Nevertheless, the report did note that some claimants make an asylum or human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of Hezbollah due to their membership of left wing parties such as the National Liberal Party, the Socialist and Progressive Party or the Lebanese Communist Party (UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate 2006, Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon, UK Home Office website, 20 September http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/lebanon?view=Binary – Accessed 8 December 2007 – Attachment 12).
Following a fact-finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service in 1998, it reported that a Hezbollah representative denied that the organisation resorts to conscription, explaining that enrolment in Hezbollah is entirely voluntary. He said that people join up out of conviction and the organisation's Islamic basis means that many are ready to die for the cause, if need be. With regards to the recruitment of non-Shiite Muslims to Hezbollah, the source said that the organisation includes a number of Sunni Muslims, but generally relies mostly on Shiite Muslims (‘Report on fact-finding mission to Lebanon’ 1998, Danish Immigration Service, 1–18 May http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3ae6a5be4.pdf – Accessed 16 January – Attachment 13).

*Jane’s Intelligence and Insight* estimates that there are some six to eight hundred hardened Hezbollah fighters called Islamic Resistance (IR).

These fighters are typically aged in their late-20s to early-30s, many of them combat veterans of the IR resistance campaign against the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) in the 1990s. The fighters are often schooled in different disciplines, such as sniping, firing anti-tank missiles, surveillance and communications, and bomb-making. There are perhaps 5,000 to 7,000 part-time fighters, acting essentially as a reserve force or village guards. Many of them are combat veterans of the 1990s and are proficient in the handling of rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and Katyusha rockets. The part-time cadre comprised the bulk of IR's fighting force in the July-August 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah, deployed in and around their villages in south Lebanon. In the event of a national emergency, Hizbullah can theoretically draw upon its entire membership which could be as many as 25,000. Every Hizbullah member is obliged to undergo a basic military training course, conducted on an ad hoc basis in the eastern Bekaa with IR instructors, although specialist training is carried out in Iran (‘Hizbullah’ 2006, *Jane’s Intelligence and Insight*, 27 October – Accessed 16 January 2007 – Attachment 14).

(3) Are there generally reprisals against families or those who do not join the Hezbollah?


(4) What are the parts of sections of Lebanon which are not under the control of the Hezbollah?

Achrafieh, Mazaraa and Saifi districts in Beirut are not under Hezbollah control. In these districts, the population consists of Sunni Muslims, Maronites, Greek Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Evangelical groups. The other parts of Beirut are under the influence of Hezbollah. Districts in Mount Lebanon are under Maronite control except for the district of Baabda-Aley, which is under Hezbollah dominance. North Lebanon districts of Akkar, Dinnieh, Bsherri, Tripoli, Mnyeh, Zghorta, Batroun and Koura are under the domination of Sunni and Maronite and Southern Lebanon is entirely under Hezbollah (‘Elections 2005’ 2005, Lebanonwire website, 29 May http://www.lebanonwire.com – Accessed 17 January 2007 – Attachment 15).
(5) Can a Shiite or indeed anyone who lives in a Hezbollah stronghold freely relocate to other parts of Lebanon?

The UK Home Office Report reports that the Lebanese authorities are willing and able to offer sufficient protection and internal relocation in the majority of cases. However, individuals who establish that they are of significant interest to Hezbollah may not be able to obtain protection in Southern Lebanon and other Hezbollah areas and may not be able to internally relocate (UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate 2006, Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon, UK Home Office website, 20 September http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countrypecificasylumpolicyogns/lebanon?view=Binary – Accessed 8 December 2007 – Attachment 12).
In a 2004 report on Lebanon, the European Union states that the Lebanese constitution
recognises freedom of movement and there are no barriers to moving within Lebanon.
Nevertheless, the report noted that restrictions were imposed by the religious courts in family
litigation cases (‘Country Report Lebanon’ 2004, European Union website, 31 December

According to Dr. Zeina Zaatari, a woman's family will often collectively make the decisions
regarding her movement in Lebanon. Age and socioeconomic background are additional
factors that may contribute to a woman's degree of personal freedom and autonomy. There
are no legal avenues for men or women to file complaints against restrictive family decisions
regarding their movement (Zaatari Z. 2005, ‘Lebanon’, Freedom House website
Attachment 18).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports
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UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

United Nations (UN)
UNHCR www.unhcr.org

Non-Government Organisations

International News & Politics
Council of Foreign Relations www.cfr.org
Washington Post website www.washingtonpost.com
Boston website www.boston.com
Socialist Worker Online www.socialistworker.org
New York Times website www.nyt.com

Oxford Research Group website www.oxfordresearchgroup.org
Guardian website www.guardian.co.uk
Freedom House website www.freedomhouse.org

Region Specific Links
Asia Times Online www.asiatimes.com
Aljazeera website http://english.aljazeera.net/News

Middle East Report Online www.merip.org

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Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue
List of Attachments


