

## Refugee Review Tribunal

### AUSTRALIA

#### RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

**Research Response Number:** LBN31201  
**Country:** Lebanon  
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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) 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

Israel in July and August of 2006, the Israeli air strikes caused substantial damage to houses, farmland, industrial plants and infrastructure in the Bekaa Valley. Thousands of civilians fled the area to neighbouring Syria and following the 14 August 2006 ceasefire, many civilians returned to their homes and were provided assistance by the Hezbollah's team of doctors, nurses, veterinarians, bulldozers, agronomists and engineers. The Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture produced a socio-economic report on Southern Lebanon in 2003 and according to this report, there are some five hundred and thirty nine thousand people living in the Bekaa Valley and 20 per cent of the population engage in agricultural activities while only 15 to 20 per cent of the population is literate. Unemployment is estimated around 10.7 per cent and there is evidence that a number of agricultural workers engage in the cultivation of drugs (Bennett, R.M. 2006, 'Hezbollah digs in deep', *Asia Times Online*, 25 July [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/HG25Ak03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HG25Ak03.html) – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 1; 'Hezbollah (a.k.a. Hizbollah, Hizbu'llah)' 2006, Council of Foreign Relations website, 17 July <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9155/> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 2; Randon, J. 2006, 'Factfile: Hezbollah', *Aljazeera* website, 14 July <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=24454> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 3; Hezbollah Wins Easy Victory In Elections in Southern Lebanon' 2005, *Washington Post* website, 6 June <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/05/AR2005060501144.html> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 4; Khan, Z. 2006, 'Hezbollah enmeshed Lebanon's social fabric', *Boston* website, 11 August [http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2006/08/11/hezbollah\\_enmeshed\\_lebanons\\_social\\_fabric/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2006/08/11/hezbollah_enmeshed_lebanons_social_fabric/?page=1) – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 5; Camp, J.V. 2006, 'Who is Hezbollah?', *Socialist Worker Online*, 22 September [http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-2/602/602\\_05\\_Hezbollah.shtml](http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-2/602/602_05_Hezbollah.shtml) – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 6; Deeb, L. 2006, 'Hizballah: A Primer', *Middle East Report Online*, 31 July <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero073106.html> – Accessed 16 January 2007 – Attachment 7 Sachs, S. 2000, 'Helping Hand of Hezbollah Emerging in South Lebanon', *New York Times* website, 30 May <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/hlphzbl.htm> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 8; Rogers, P. 2006, 'The Lebanon Aftermath', Oxford Research Group, August <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/paulrogers/Aug06.pdf> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 9; 'Socio-economic situation: National Action Programme' 2003, Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, 17 July <http://www.codel-lb.org/page4.html> – Accessed 15 January 2007 – Attachment 10; Whitaker, B. 2001, 'Green gold', *Guardian* website, 11 June <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4201692,00.html> – Accessed 16 January 2007 – Attachment 11).

**(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/countryspecificasylumpolicyogngs/lebanon?vie w=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?**

According to a UK Home Office Report, there are no known reports of reprisals against people by Hezbollah or any accounts of forced recruitment (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).

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

Achra fieh, 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).



Source: 'Map of Lebanon' (undated), World Atlas website  
<http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/lcolor/lbcolor.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2007 – Attachment 16)

**(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/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/lebanon?vie w=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 <http://www.dellbn.cec.eu.int/en/pev/report.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2007 – Attachment 17.

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 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=176> – Accessed 17 January 2007 – Attachment 18).

## **List of Sources Consulted**

### **Internet Sources:**

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

Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture [www.codel-lb.org](http://www.codel-lb.org)

UK Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate [www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk)

European Union website [http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm)

#### **United Nations (UN)**

UNHCR [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

#### **Non-Government Organisations**

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

Council of Foreign Relations [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org)

*Washington Post* website [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

*Boston* website [www.boston.com](http://www.boston.com)

*Socialist Worker Online* [www.socialistworker.org](http://www.socialistworker.org)

*New York Times* website [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com)

Oxford Research Group website [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org)

*Guardian* website [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

Freedom House website [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

#### **Region Specific Links**

*Asia Times Online* [www.asiatimes.com](http://www.asiatimes.com)

*Aljazeera* website <http://english.aljazeera.net/News>

*Middle East Report Online* [www.merip.org](http://www.merip.org)

#### **Topic Specific Links**

*Lebanonwire* website [www.lebanonwire.com](http://www.lebanonwire.com)

#### **Search Engines**

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

#### **Online Subscription Services**

#### **Library Networks**

#### **University Sites**

#### **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. Bennett, R.M. 2006, 'Hezbollah digs in deep', *Asia Times Online*, 25 July [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/HG25Ak03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HG25Ak03.html) – Accessed 15 January 2007.
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3. Randon, J. 2006, 'Factfile: Hezbollah', *Aljazeera* website, 14 July <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=24454> – Accessed 15 January 2007.
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5. Khan, Z. 2006, 'Hezbollah enmeshed Lebanon's social fabric', *Boston* website, 11 August [http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2006/08/11/hezbollah\\_enmeshed\\_lebanons\\_social\\_fabric/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2006/08/11/hezbollah_enmeshed_lebanons_social_fabric/?page=1) – Accessed 15 January 2007.
6. Camp, J.V. 2006, 'Who is Hezbollah?', *Socialist Worker Online*, 22 September [http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-2/602/602\\_05\\_Hezbollah.shtml](http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-2/602/602_05_Hezbollah.shtml) – Accessed 15 January 2007.
7. Deeb, L. 2006, 'Hizballah: A Primer', *Middle East Report Online*, 31 July <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero073106.html> – Accessed 16 January 2007.
8. Sachs, S. 2000, 'Helping Hand of Hezbollah Emerging in South Lebanon', *New York Times* website, 30 May <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/hlphzbl.htm> – Accessed 15 January 2007.
9. Rogers, P. 2006, 'The Lebanon Aftermath', Oxford Research Group, August <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/paulrogers/Aug06.pdf> – Accessed 15 January 2007.
10. 'Socio-economic situation: National Action Programme' 2003, Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, 17 July <http://www.codel-lb.org/page4.html> – Accessed 15 January 2007.
11. Whitaker, B. 2001, 'Green gold', *Guardian* website, 11 June <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4201692,00.html> – Accessed 16 January 2007.
12. 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.)
13. '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.

14. 'Hizbullah' 2006, *Jane's Intelligence and Insight*, 27 October – Accessed 16 January 2007.
15. 'Elections 2005' 2005, *Lebanonwire* website, 29 May <http://www.lebanonwire.com> – Accessed 17 January 2007.
16. 'Map of Lebanon' (undated), World Atlas website <http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/lgcolor/lbcolor.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2007.
17. 'Country Report Lebanon' 2004, European Union website, 31 December <http://www.dellbn.cec.eu.int/en/pev/report.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2007.
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