

Rights group says Israel must face war crimes probe over journalist killing in Lebanon

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The camera that belonged to Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah is displayed during a press

conference by rights groups as they released findings from their investigations into the deadly October 13 strikes by Israel on southern Lebanon, in Beirut, Lebanon, December 7, 2023. (Photo by Reuters)

Beirut, December 8 (RHC)-- International human rights organizations say Israeli strikes that killed a journalist and injured six others in southern Lebanon must be investigated as a war crime.

Separate investigations by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International determined Israel's military fired artillery at journalists near the border on October 13. Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah, 37, was killed instantly in the strike. The others present — two more Reuters journalists, two from Al Jazeera, and two from AFP — were all injured. AFP photographer Christina Assi, 28, was seriously wounded. She later had a leg amputated and is still in hospital.

On Thursday, Human Rights Watch called for “an immediate, independent, and transparent investigation that holds the perpetrators to account” for the strike on journalists in Lebanon. The New York-based rights group said the “evidence indicates that the Israeli military knew or should have known that the group of people they were firing on were civilians”, making the attack a “war crime.”

“This is an unlawful and apparently deliberate attack on a very visible group of journalists.” Under international humanitarian law, “it is forbidden in any circumstances to carry out direct attacks against civilians,” it said.

Amnesty, in its own report, said the Israeli military strikes “were likely a direct attack on civilians that must be investigated as a war crime.” The group's investigation showed the journalists were “well removed from ongoing hostilities, clearly identifiable as members of the media, and had been stationary for at least 75 minutes before they were hit.”

“No journalist should ever be targeted or killed simply for carrying out their work. Israel must not be allowed to kill and attack journalists with impunity,” said Aya Majzoub, Amnesty's deputy regional director for West Asia and North Africa.

Human Rights Watch also called on Israel's main backers – the United States, Britain, Canada and Germany – to “suspend military assistance and arms sales to Israel, given the risk they will be used for grave abuses.”

Since the Gaza war broke out, at least 63 journalists have been killed, including 56 Palestinians, four Israelis, and three Lebanese nationals, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Over 22 years, CPJ has documented at least 20 journalist killings by Israel. No one has ever been charged or held responsible for these deaths.

The organization said the impunity in these cases has severely undermined the freedom of the press, leaving journalists vulnerable to attack. Meanwhile, the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah says it has conducted fresh retaliatory attacks on Israeli positions south of Lebanon.

The retaliatory attacks come in response to the regime's bombardment of some residential areas in the Ayta ash-Shab village in southern Lebanon.

Israel relentlessly continues with its all-out aggression in Gaza. According to the Palestinian health ministry, the onslaught on Gaza has claimed more than 17,200 lives since the regime began its attacks on October 7.

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