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# LEBANON

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## Lebanese Republic

**Population:** 3.6 million (1.2 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 72,100

**Compulsory recruitment age:** None (ended in 2007)

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 17 or 18

**Voting age:** 21

**Optional Protocol:** signed 11 February 2002

**Other treaties ratified (see glossary):**

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138, ILO 182

***Voluntary enlistment was possible for soldiers from the age of 17, and at 18 for non-commissioned personnel and officers. Armed groups were involved in the training and recruitment of children.***

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## Context

From 2005 Lebanon's stability was threatened by a series of political assassinations, a 33-day war with Israel in 2006, and increased discord among the country's mostly religious-based political groupings. In 2005 Syrian troops withdrew from the country under international pressure after the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq al-Hariri, responsibility for which was not claimed by any group.<sup>1</sup> In July 2006 Israel launched an intensive military campaign in Lebanon; seven Israeli children and nearly 400 Lebanese children were killed in the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Between May and September 2007 the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) fought Fatah al-Islam, an Islamist armed group based in a Palestinian refugee camp. The violence resulted in the deaths of at least 169 soldiers, 287 members of Fatah al-Islam and 47 civilians.<sup>3</sup> At least two children were killed, although exact figures were not released.<sup>4</sup> They were among 127,000 Palestinian children living in Lebanon's 12 official refugee camps and a number of informal settlements. Of these children, the UN agency mandated to respond to the needs of Palestinian refugees, the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA)<sup>5</sup>, considered over 18,000 to be cases of particular economic hardship.<sup>6</sup> Up to 5,000 more Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were not registered and had no documentation.<sup>7</sup> This prevented their access to a number of services and made it difficult to determine the age of children, who had no birth certificates.<sup>8</sup>

## Israel–Hizbollah conflict

Israel launched an intensive ground and aerial assault on Lebanon in July 2006, after the abduction of two of its soldiers by Hizbollah in a cross-border attack the previous month.<sup>9</sup> A

total of 1,191 Lebanese, a third of whom were estimated to be children, were killed in the 33-day conflict.<sup>10</sup> Around 1 million people were displaced. In one incident, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) bombed a residential building in Qana, killing 27 civilians, 16 of whom were children. The IDF inquiry claimed that Hizbollah was using the civilians as “human shields”.<sup>11</sup> However, a subsequent investigation by Human Rights Watch found no evidence to support this claim.<sup>12</sup> Further attacks resulted in damage to 3,000 schools and the total destruction of 40 schools. The IDF use of cluster bombs, many dropped in the last 72 hours of the war, posed a lasting threat to Lebanese civilians after the withdrawal of Israeli troops. From 14 August to the end of September 2007, five children were killed and 66 were injured by munitions.<sup>13</sup> This included 13-year-old Hadi Hattab, who was killed an hour after the ceasefire came into effect after stepping on a cluster bomb outside his home.<sup>14</sup> The UN repeatedly asked the IDF to give specific information on the location of the remaining estimated 170,000 to 340,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance.<sup>15</sup> This had not been disclosed by late 2007.

UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) paved the way for Israel's withdrawal and a strengthened UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) of up to 15,000 troops in the south, alongside 15,000 LAF troops. Following the July–August 2006 crisis, UNIFIL's remit was extended to supporting the LAF as they deployed in southern Lebanon and helping to ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the safe return of displaced persons. The resolution recalled previous calls for the disarmament of all armed groups.<sup>16</sup> However, Hizbollah continued to retain its arms and the military wings of other political parties were reported to be recruiting new members and rearming.<sup>17</sup>

Lebanon remained formally at war with Israel, which occupied Lebanese disputed territory.

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## Government

### National recruitment legislation and practice

There were no reports of child recruitment or deployment by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Compulsory military service ended in February 2007, following a government decree in 2005 which was agreed by all political parties.<sup>18</sup> Decree Number 665 of 2005 reduced the period of service in the two-year transition period to six months.<sup>19</sup> Deferrals and exemptions were available on a number of grounds. From February 2007 all recruitment was voluntary; officers and non-commissioned personnel and specialists could join from the age of 18. However, soldiers were allowed to enlist from the age of 17.<sup>20</sup> The

Lebanese Armed Forces had said in 2004 that under-18s were not allowed to take part in active service.<sup>21</sup>

## **Military training and military schools**

Military training for recruits took place at the Flag Service Camp, which ran induction courses for all soldiers. There was also a military school for officers, the Fu'ad Shihab Command and Staff College, which offered further education, and specialist schools running courses for trained soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

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## **Armed groups**

Hizbollah was the principal Lebanese political party to retain an armed wing after the end of the civil war in 1989. However, the unstable political situation led to renewed militarization by most groups. All armed wings of political parties were reportedly rearming.<sup>23</sup> Mainly Christian parties, such as the Kataeb (Phalange) and the Lebanese Forces, were reported to have opened recruitment offices in the Beirut suburbs.<sup>24</sup> Military training was also stepped up by parties associated with Lebanon's Druze population and Sunni Muslim groups.<sup>25</sup> Pro-Syrian Christian groups, including the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) led by General Aoun and Suleiman Franjeh's Marada movement were reported to have organized "youth summer camp" programs. These combined physical activities with political indoctrination.<sup>26</sup> The armed wings of other pro-Syrian forces, the Syrian Nationalist Party and mainly Shia groups, Amal and Hizbollah, were also reported to have provided military training to children.<sup>27</sup>

No children were reported to have participated in armed action on behalf of any Lebanese group since 2001, including during the conflict in 2006. Nevertheless, in 2007 the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict warned that "should sectarian violence flare in the current political climate ... children and youth may well become involved". She added that the insecurity and lack of social and economic outlets for young people increased the attraction of the "culture of martyrdom".<sup>28</sup>

## **Hizbollah**

Hizbollah was the largest armed political group in the country with a base mainly in Shia areas. It said that it supported the country's ratification of the Optional Protocol in meetings with government officials.<sup>29</sup> The group denied any use of children in the ongoing conflict with Israel, including the war of 2006.<sup>30</sup> In 2007 there were reports that its military wing was recruiting boys aged 16–19. Hizbollah reportedly offered one month's basic military training and the prospect of further training and attractive salaries

for those who excelled.<sup>31</sup> The group also ran a number of activities for younger children through its youth wing, the al-Mahdi scouts. Nearly 42,000 children from the age of six took part in activities organized by the group in 2005.<sup>32</sup> These reportedly included one-month summer camps which featured religious education, arts, culture, physical training and games.<sup>33</sup> These activities and a number of services, including hospitals, nurseries, television and radio outlets and at least 12 schools, offered a means to extend Hizbollah's influence and ideology.<sup>34</sup>

## **Palestinian groups**

A number of armed political groups operated in the refugee camps, including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and PFLP-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Children reportedly participated in internal Palestinian clashes, mainly to harass and intimidate members of other groups. Children as young as ten were also reported to be taking part in military training. In April 2007 militias linked to Fatah and the radical Sunni group, Asbat al-Ansar, carried out military training for children in the Ain Helwah refugee camp.<sup>35</sup>

## **Fatah al-Islam**

This radical Sunni group was set up by a group who arrived at Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in northern Lebanon at the end of 2006. The group was reported to have enticed Palestinian children to attend Quranic schools with small amounts of money. According to one report, they were shown videos of events in Iraq and demonstrations of weapons training.<sup>36</sup> There were reports that children fought with the group in the three-month conflict with the Lebanese army.<sup>37</sup> At least two children were killed in the violence. Many more were affected by the panic and mass evacuation of 31,000 people from the camp.<sup>38</sup> The group was defeated by the LAF in September 2007, although the return of residents was delayed by the need to rebuild the camp.<sup>39</sup>

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## **Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)**

Lebanese army and international experts continued to remove the remaining 1.2 million unexploded ordnance left by Israeli forces.<sup>40</sup> Mine-awareness training for children was undertaken by the Lebanese army, UNICEF, Norwegian People's Aid, DanChurch Aid and the Red Cross.<sup>41</sup> The government operated three medical and psychological centres to support child victims of armed conflict in Beirut, Nabatieh and Sidon. These were overseen by a not-for-profit organization, the Association for the Care

of Children in War.<sup>42</sup> Following the 2006 conflict with Israel, psychosocial support programs were offered to children by organizations including UNICEF, Terre des hommes, Save the Children Sweden and the local non-governmental organization Naba'a.<sup>43</sup>

## Developments

Lebanon had yet to ratify the Optional Protocol after signing it in 2001. In March 2007 the Permanent Peace Movement launched a campaign to gather support for ratification. It established a network of organizations working on child rights to raise awareness and to put in place measures to prevent child recruitment.<sup>44</sup> During the April 2007 visit of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and a parliamentary deputy, Mohamed Raad, representing Hizbollah, stated that Lebanon would ratify the Optional Protocol and would prohibit the participation of children in armed violence.<sup>45</sup>

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) provided training on international humanitarian law (IHL) for the LAF and UNIFIL forces.<sup>46</sup> In 2006 it ran its first IHL training for a group of field commanders from the military wing of Hizbollah.<sup>47</sup>

Lebanon was listed as a situation of concern in the Secretary-General's sixth report to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict in October 2006.<sup>48</sup> The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited the area in April 2007. She pressed UNIFIL to appoint a child protection officer to monitor events in the area south of the Litani river. She also urged increased funding for psychosocial programs for Lebanese children who had been affected by the conflict with Israel, as well as for UNRWA's work in Palestinian camps.<sup>49</sup>

\* Titles of non-English language sources have been translated by the Coalition.

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- 6 Written replies by Lebanon to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/LBN/Q/3/Add.1, 27 April 2006.
- 7 Amnesty International, "Limitations on rights of Palestinian refugee children", 2006.
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- 11 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Completion of inquiry into July 30th incident in Qana", 2 August 2006, [www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il).
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- 15 See, e.g., UN Report, Visit of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to the Middle East, UN OSRSG/CAAC, 9–20 April 2007.
- 16 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), UN Doc. S/RES/1701, 11 August 2006.
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- 19 Flag Service Law 665, Article 2 (Arabic), [www.lebarmy.gov.lb](http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb).
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- 22 Lebanese Army site, above note 20.
- 23 ICG, above note 17.
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- 25 "War of words and photos between police, Aoun's FPM", *Naharnet*, 4 October 2007, see [www.naharnet.com/](http://www.naharnet.com/); Nicholas Blanford, "Lebanon's militias rearm before vote", *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 November 2007; Chancy Chassay, "Fears of new civil war increase as Lebanese political factions rearm", *Guardian*, 6 February 2007.
- 26 Cambanis, above note 24.
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- 28 Visit of the Special Representative, above note 15.
- 29 Information in response to e-mail questions by the Coalition from the Higher Council for Childhood Lebanon, Ministry of Social Affairs, 19 October 2007.
- 30 Visit of the Special Representative, above note 15.
- 31 "Hizbullah getting stronger in Lebanon", Associated Press, 4 October 2007.

- 32 See Mahdi scout website (Arabic), [www.almahdiscouts.net/](http://www.almahdiscouts.net/); Scout summer camps information on Bint Jbeil website, [www.bintjbeil.org](http://www.bintjbeil.org).
- 33 See Mahdi scout website, above note 32.
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