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# Israeli Officials Signal Stepped-Up Atrocities in Lebanon

## Risk of Forcible Displacement, Wanton Destruction, Threat of Strikes on Civilians



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On March 22, Israel's defense Minister, Israel Katz, issued a [statement](#) announcing that he and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have "ordered the acceleration of the demolition of Lebanese houses in the border villages in order to thwart threats to Israeli communities - in accordance with the Beit Hanoun and Rafah models in Gaza." On March 16, 2026, Katz said that "hundreds of thousands of Shiite residents of southern Lebanon [...] will not return to their homes south of the Litani area until the safety of Israel's northern residents is guaranteed." Displacement orders issued by the Israeli military to residents of the southern suburbs of Beirut between March 11 and 15 further stated that the Israeli military "will not hesitate to target anyone who is present near Hezbollah members, facilities, or means of combat."

"For over two years, Israel's allies and European states that purport to support and uphold human rights have buried their heads in the sand as atrocities continue in Lebanon, as in Gaza," said [Ramzi Kaiss](#), Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Atrocities flourish when there is impunity, and other countries should no longer stand by as they continue."

Since the recent escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah on March 2, Israeli attacks have killed at least 1,029 people in Lebanon, including 118 children and 40 medical workers, as of March 22 according to Lebanon's [Ministry of Public Health](#). In recent days, Hezbollah has fired an average of about [150 rockets per day](#), according to the Israeli military. Hezbollah attacks have injured at least 15 people in Israel, according to [Israeli mediareports](#).

On March 4 and 5, the Israeli military issued [displacement orders](#) for the entire population of Lebanon south of the Litani River and all residents of Beirut's [southern suburbs](#), which include hundreds of thousands of people. Since March 12, the Israeli military has [expanded](#) the areas subject to displacement orders, ordering residents of southern Lebanon to evacuate north of the Zahrani River, 15 kilometers north of the Litani River, and 40 kilometers north of Lebanon's southern border with Israel. Over a [million](#) people have been displaced in Lebanon thus far.

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war crime of wanton destruction and violations of the prohibition under international law against deliberately destroying civilian property except when necessary for lawful military reasons. The mere possibility of future military use by armed groups of some civilian structures cannot under the [laws of war](#) justify the wide-scale destruction of whole homes across Lebanon's border.

Between March 11 and 15, the Israeli military's Arabic spokesperson issued at least five nearly identical displacement orders for residents of seven neighborhoods in Beirut's southern suburbs, after first issuing a sweeping displacement order for entire southern suburbs of Beirut on March 5. The statement ordered residents to "evacuate the area immediately" and called on them to "not return to those neighborhoods until further notice."

The orders further stated that the Israeli military "will not hesitate to target anyone who is present near Hezbollah members, facilities, or means of combat." This differs from previous [orders](#) issued to residents of Beirut's southern suburbs, which stated, for example, that "Anyone who is near Hezbollah members, facilities or means of combat is putting their lives at risk."

On March 5, minister in the defense ministry, Bezalel Smotrich, who sits on the security cabinet and also serves as Israel's finance minister, recorded a video statement standing at the Israel-Lebanon border, stating that "very soon, Dahieh [Beirut's southern suburb] will look like Khan Younis," in Gaza. Human Rights Watch has previously documented [war crimes](#), [crimes against humanity](#), and [acts of genocide](#) by the Israeli military in Gaza.

These statements, combined with Israeli forces' previous conduct of war in Lebanon, raise serious concern that the Israeli military may target civilians, based solely on their presence in or proximity to areas where Hezbollah is present.

Since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces have committed numerous violations of the [laws of war](#) and apparent [war crimes](#) in Lebanon with total impunity, including apparently deliberate or indiscriminate

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military said that it struck at least four Litani River bridges.

Hezbollah should take all feasible precautions to protect civilians in its operations in Lebanon and Israel.

Civilians who do not evacuate following orders are still fully protected by international humanitarian law. Forced displacement is [prohibited](#) under the laws of war, except in cases in which civilian security is involved or for imperative military reasons.

A person who commits serious violations of the laws of war with criminal intent—that is, intentionally or recklessly—may be prosecuted for war crimes. Individuals may also be held criminally liable for assisting in, facilitating, aiding, or abetting a war crime.

Lebanon’s judicial authorities should initiate domestic investigations of serious international crimes, and the government should accede to the International Criminal Court’s Rome Statute and submit a declaration accepting the court’s jurisdiction prior to the date of accession, including since at least October 7, 2023.

[Israel’s](#) key allies, including the [United States](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and [Germany](#), should [suspend](#) military assistance and arms sales to Israel and impose targeted sanctions on officials credibly responsible for ongoing serious abuses. They should levy further pressure on Israel to ensure that displaced residents can return to their homes once hostilities end or once the reasons for their displacement cease to exist.

“The Israeli military does not get to decide when civilians lose protections afforded by international law nor should it be allowed to prevent displaced residents from returning to their homes based on some undefined ‘safety’ standard,” Kaiss said. “Deliberately targeting civilians, civilian objects, and others protected under international law would be a war crime, and countries supplying Israel with

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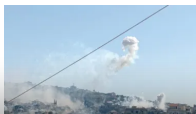
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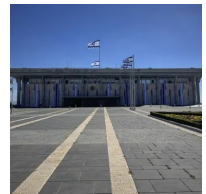
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