

Madness at the 'gates of hell'

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Article

New Sunday Times - 08/13/2006

"We are dealing with a ruthless, cynical, cruel enemy, one of the most monstrous terror organisations this world has known."

This statement was directed at the Lebanon-based Hizbollah by its adversary in a CNN report recently. But it is like the pot calling the kettle black as evident by the barbaric attacks on the Lebanese people.

Even the Security Council, in attempting to find a ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah, warns that continued fighting could have "grave consequences".

No place better illustrates the case than Qana, a coastal town east of Tyre, in southern Lebanon.

The fact that the Security Council expressed "extreme shock and distress" at the bombing of Qana and offered its condolences for the deaths underscores how brutal the incident was.

The UN Secretary-General's repeated calls for an "immediate cessation of hostilities" has also gone unheeded.

The attack on Qana demolished a four-storey residential building used as a shelter by Lebanese refugees. More than 60 civilians, including at least 37 children, were killed.

A Red Cross source said many of the children sleeping inside were handicapped. Not surprisingly, Lebanon deemed it a war crime, though to the Israel officials, it was only a tragic mistake.

If so, this is the second for Qana, considering that 10 years ago, it was also demolished by Israeli forces. About the same number were left dead — more than 60 Lebanese refugees, including 42 children, near a UN base.

On July 25, four UN observers from Austria, Canada, China and Finland were killed as the result of a similar bombing of the area.

Just two days earlier, two Lebanese Red Cross ambulances in Qana were attacked. Five of the volunteers and three patients were wounded.

When Israel shelled Qana in April 1996, it claimed it was an accident and that its forces had aimed at a Hizbollah military target. Like the recent attack, the 1996 Qana bombing was one of the deadliest single events that took place (visual is at <http://tyros.leb.net/qana/>).

The only difference this time was a single massive bomb deliberately dropped by an Israeli aircraft, caused a building to collapse on top of dozens of civilians taking cover in the basement.

Then, as now, Israel was quick to accuse Hizbollah of using the civilian population as human shields.

Interestingly enough, British newspaper The Observer reported in May 1996 that Israel was at least indirectly responsible for triggering the April shelling of a UN base in Qana.

The Israelis had been scouting the Qana area to spot Hizbollah guerillas. When they felt they had been detected, they radioed for help and were ordered to withdraw, the newspaper said. For cover, the shelling was ordered by the Israeli commander.

In 1996, the aggression was halted following the so-called "tragic accident" in Qana.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora said the "opening the gates of hell and madness" on his country would witness even more "mistakes".

Qana, a place where Jesus was to perform his first miracle as mentioned in the Gospel of St John, has to be the one potent symbol of such grave "mistakes" by the Israelis.

Unless there is another god-send miracle, "the gates of hell and madness" in Lebanon can never be kept shut.

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