

Israel-Hamas war

Israeli strikes on journalists in Lebanon were 'apparently deliberate', say rights groups

Attacks killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah and wounded six others as they filmed shelling on border with Israel



Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah, pictured in Turkey earlier this year, died in Lebanon in October after being struck by an Israeli tank shell © Issam Abdallah/Reuters

Raya Jalabi in Beirut YESTERDAY

Israeli strikes in Lebanon that killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah and injured six others in October were “apparently deliberate” attacks on civilians tantamount to a war crime, two international human rights groups have concluded.

“The evidence strongly suggests that Israeli forces knew or should have known that the group that they were attacking were journalists,” said Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch. “This was an unlawful and apparently deliberate attack on a very visible group of journalists.”

The incident occurred on October 13, six days into Israel’s [war against Hamas](#) in Gaza. The fighting almost immediately spilled into Lebanon, where militants from the Hamas-allied Hizbollah militant group have engaged in near-daily exchanges of fire with Israel’s military along the two countries’ shared border.

The group of seven journalists — from Lebanon, Iraq and the US who were working for Reuters, Al Jazeera and Agence France-Presse — were at the Lebanese border town of Alma al-Shaab following reports that armed fighters had attempted to infiltrate Israel from [Lebanon](#).

The group was filming about 2km away from Israeli shelling when they were struck by

an Israeli tank shell, which killed 37-year-old Abdallah, investigations by [Amnesty International](#) and [HRW](#) found.

Just 37 seconds later, the group was struck by an unknown munition that destroyed a car used by Al Jazeera, wounding the remaining six journalists. [Reuters' own investigation](#) — which relied on evidence gathered from the scene and analysed by independent experts — found that both rounds were fired by Israeli tanks.

Amnesty International reviewed more than 100 videos and photographs, analysed weapons fragments from the site and interviewed witnesses. HRW additionally reviewed satellite images. Both groups consulted military, weapons, video and audio experts.

The group of seven were not near any ongoing hostilities and were clearly identifiable as members of the media. They were wearing flak jackets and helmets, most marked “press”, and Al Jazeera’s car was also marked as a press vehicle, the investigations found.

They were in view of an Israeli Apache helicopter — which hovered above the group for more than 40 minutes before the first strike — and possibly a surveillance drone, said HRW and Amnesty. HRW added that the group was also “within line of sight of five Israeli surveillance towers” capable of identifying human targets.

Asked about the reports on Thursday, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said he was not aware of the finding, adding: “We do not target civilians.”

International humanitarian law prohibits attacks on journalists, who are considered civilians not party to any conflict and not military targets. Directly targeting civilians is forbidden by the Geneva Conventions, which have been ratified by all UN member states, including Israel.

Reuters and AFP called on Israel to provide a clear explanation for what AFP global news director Phil Chetwynd called the “inexplicable and unacceptable” targeting of the news agency’s journalists.

The quest for accountability will be complicated as neither Israel nor Lebanon are signatories to the International Criminal Court, whose jurisdiction includes the prosecution of war crimes. The two neighbouring countries have also never had diplomatic relations.

At least 63 journalists have been killed since the start of the Gaza conflict, including 56 Palestinians, three Lebanese and four Israelis, according to the Committee to

Protect Journalists. October was the deadliest month for journalists on record since CPJ began collecting data 30 years ago.

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