



Rescue workers carry a dead body through the rubble after Israeli air strikes on the southern Lebanese village of Qana yesterday. At least 52 people were killed, 30 of them children, when Israeli war planes blitzed Qana, the deadliest single strike since the Jewish state unleashed its war on Hezbollah 19 days ago.

'Nothing can justify' Israeli bombing of Qana: EU

World condemns Lebanon carnage

AFP, Brussels/ Beirut

The deaths of 51 civilians in Israeli raids on the Lebanese village of Qana yesterday fuelled anger at the Jewish state's military onslaught and gave tragic new impetus to ceasefire plans.

The European Union's foreign policy chief Javier Solana said on Sunday that nothing could justify the deadly Israeli bombing of the village of Qana.

"I have talked to the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr Fuad Siniora. I have expressed to him my profound dismay and deep sorrow at the attack and the death of innocent civilians in Qana. Nothing can justify that," Solana said in a statement issued in Brussels.

"I have transmitted to him that the European Union is continuously working to reach an immediate ceasefire," he said.

The United Nations condemned

an Israeli strike on a village in southern Lebanon on Sunday, which killed 51 people, including several children, and called for an immediate inquiry.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's representative Geir Pedersen said he was "deeply shocked and saddened by the killing of tens of Lebanese civilians, including many children in Qana, south Lebanon, and calls for immediate ceasefire and investigation," a statement said.

"I strongly condemn today's killing of tens of civilians by the Israeli shelling of residential buildings in the village of Qana. This tragic event demonstrates the urgency for all parties to heed the United Nations repeated calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities," he said.

Pedersen said "civilians have been paying the heaviest price for this war and I reiterate calls by the

secretary general of the United Nations to all parties concerned to respect international humanitarian laws and spare the civilians further suffering and loss."

"Earlier this month, the secretary general condemned all actions that target civilians and civilian infrastructure and the high commissioner for human rights called for accountability for any breaches of international humanitarian law," he said.

"We call for an immediate investigation of this incident," he said.

Protestors attacked and broke into the UN headquarters in downtown Beirut, furious about the Israeli raids on Qana.

UN staff in the building sought refuge in an underground basement, an employee told AFP.

Qana was where an Israeli bombing of a United Nations base on April 18, 1996 killed 105 people who had taken refuge during Israel's

"Grapes of Wrath" offensive.

The United States reiterated Sunday its support for Israel in the Middle East crisis, and urged the Jewish state to use restraint.

White House spokesman Blaine Rethmeier, asked by AFP for a response to the Israeli attack Sunday on the southern Lebanese village of Qana, said there was no change in position.

The United States "continues to urge Israel to use restraint," Rethmeier said in a telephone interview.

Israel has the "right to defence," he said, recalling previous White House statements expressing strong support of Israel since the conflict began on July 12.

Israel unleashed its firepower on Qana after flatly rejecting a United Nations call for a 72-hour truce to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to Lebanon.

US plan for Lebanon force seen as 'folly'

AFP, Beirut

US-backed plans for a stabilisation force to pacify Lebanon's border are nothing more than a "bandage" fix to Hezbollah's conflict with Israel, says Timur Goksel, a veteran of the region who served with the United Nations in south Lebanon for 24 years.

Goksel said in an interview with AFP that only "creative diplomacy" could bring an end to the violence, which has cost hundreds of lives, mostly of civilians in Lebanon, since July 12.

"The idea, as it stands, is a folly. The best it can do is buy time and cool tempers," said the veteran of the region

who was spokesman for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) between 1979 and 2003.

"It's a bandage, not a solution," said Goksel, who is reputed to know southern Lebanon better than anyone - bar perhaps Hezbollah itself.

For Goksel, UNIFIL can be beefed up as a peacekeeping force acceptable to all sides in Lebanon. The Shia militant group Hezbollah "can live with that. But Israel wants a fighting force," he said.

The US and British concept of a deterrent force to disarm Hezbollah and prevent it from being resupplied by its backers in Damascus and Tehran would amount to an "occu-

pation force", Goksel warned.

A year after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, a suicide attack on US marines barracks in Beirut killed 241 soldiers, and 58 French paratroopers of the same multinational force died in a similar attack on their barracks.

For Goksel, the road to peace lies through Damascus.

"If anyone thinks an efficient force will come out of this without a friendly word from Damascus, they do not know the Middle East," he said. "And if you want a favour from Syria, then you have to pay something."

Israel-bound US arms flights set to land in Britain

AFP, London

Two US aircraft carrying weapons bound for Israel were due to stop off in Britain with government approval this weekend, as demonstrators planned to protest Sunday against the controversial flights.

The Boeing 747 jets, carrying "hazardous material" from Texas to Tel Aviv, were due to touch down late Saturday and early Sunday at Glasgow Prestwick Airport in Scotland, a Civil Aviation Authority spokesman said.

He added that they would be on the tarmac for a matter of hours while they were refuelled.

UNSC weighs ME truce

AP, New York

A draft resolution circulating Saturday among UN Security Council members would call for an immediate halt to fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and seek a wide new buffer zone in south Lebanon monitored by international forces and the Lebanese army.

The proposal, which aims to promote lasting peace between Lebanon and Israel, was sent quietly by France to the other 14 members of the council ahead of a possible meeting of foreign ministers in New York to discuss Lebanon sometime next week. A copy of the draft was obtained by The Associated Press.

The proposal stresses the need "to create the conditions for a permanent cease-fire and a lasting

solution to the current crisis between Israel and Lebanon." It emphasises the need to end the escalating violence, but also "to address urgently the root causes that have given rise to the current crisis."

The conditions for a permanent cease-fire include a buffer zone stretching from the Blue Line the UN-demarcated boundary that Israel withdrew behind in 2000 to the Litani River, which was the northern border of Israel's occupation of Lebanon in 1982.

The buffer zone would be "free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Lebanese armed and security forces and of UN-mandated international forces," the draft says.

The document, which is likely to

see significant changes before adoption, is the answer to the call made Friday by President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair for a UN resolution that would lay the groundwork for peace in Lebanon and deploy an international force there.

It starts by calling for an immediate halt to fighting that began almost three weeks ago and has killed more than 500 people.

French diplomats refused to discuss the proposal, saying it had not been made public yet. Benjamin Chang, a spokesman for the UN Mission to the UN, said the Americans had only just received the draft and were still studying it.

Still, the United States has so far refused to call for an immediate halt to the hostilities, and may oppose

any demands for that.

In the three weeks since fighting began, the Security Council's only response has been a weak statement expressing shock and distress at Israel's bombing of a UN post on the Lebanon border Tuesday that killed four unarmed military observers on Tuesday.

According to the resolution, other conditions for peace include the release of the two Israeli soldiers whose abduction by Hezbollah sparked Israel's devastating military campaign; and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559, adopted in 2004, which demanded Hezbollah be disarmed and Lebanon extend its control to its southern border with Israel, where Hezbollah has de facto control.

State Dept hid costs of Iraqi projects

REUTERS, Washington

The State Department agency in charge of \$1.4 billion for reconstruction projects in Iraq used an accounting shell game to hide cost overruns and failed to tell Congress about schedule delays, The New York Times reported yesterday.

A report by the independent Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction said the US Agency for International Development listed project overruns as overhead or administrative costs.

USAID is the agency is charge of administering foreign aid and began working on Iraq reconstruction soon after the 2003 invasion began.

The inspector general's report did not give details on all projects being conducted under the \$1.4 billion budget, but noted several examples including a children's hospital in Basra and a power station in Baghdad.

Bechtel, the contractor in charge of the Basra hospital, said in April construction costs would be \$98 million, up from an original budget of \$50 million, due to escalating costs for security and other problems. USAID pledged to cut contractor overhead, but the inspector general found no effort to do that.

In a report later that month to Congress, the agency reported the cost as \$50 million with the rest reclassified as "indirect costs."

Indonesian Muslims want UN disbanded

AFP, Jakarta

Thousands of Indonesian Muslims on Sunday held a street rally in the Central Java city of Solo to protest Israel's actions in the Middle East and demand that the United Nations be disbanded.

Demonstrators at the rally, organised by the Muslim political organisation the Justice and Prosperity Party, burned US and Israeli flags as well as pictures of US President George Bush, the Detikcom online news service said.

Detikcom did not give a more precise figure for the number of protesters.

Speeches made by local party leaders condemned Israel's attacks on civilian targets in southern Lebanon and Washington's "blatant support" of the aggression.

Blair hit by cabinet backlash over Lebanon crisis

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday appeared increasingly isolated over his handling of the Lebanon crisis after his former foreign secretary Jack Straw broke cabinet ranks to attack Israel's "disproportionate" assault on Hezbollah.

Blair, on a tour of the United States, defended his support of US President George W Bush's refusal to call for an immediate ceasefire or condemn Israel's response, which has led to criticism abroad and in Britain.

It comes as at least 51 people were killed, many of them children,

when Israeli war planes Sunday blitzed a village in Lebanon, in the deadliest single strike since the Jewish state unleashed its war on Hezbollah 19 days ago.

Straw, who was replaced by Margaret Beckett in a May cabinet reshuffle, warned that Israel's retaliatory attack on the Shiite militia group in Lebanon risked fuelling further violence in the Middle East.

He is the first ranking Labour Party member to criticise Israel in such a public way, though newspapers reported that other Blair allies were privately voicing their disquiet about his refusal to censure the scale of Israel's assault.



Palestinians protest yesterday in front of the United Nations offices in Gaza City to protest against the carnage in Lebanon and Israeli incursions into the in Gaza strip.



A Congolese woman gives a thumb up while waiting in line to cast her vote in the central district of Victoire yesterday in Kinshasa, DR Congo.

Congolese vote to end years of war

REUTERS, Kinshasa

Congolese began voting yesterday in national elections designed to end years of war and chaos in the heart of Africa and that were protected by the world's biggest UN peacekeeping force.

From the crumbling riverside capital Kinshasa through to the thick jungles of the Congo river basin and the mist-shrouded peaks of the east, Democratic Republic of Congo was holding its first democratic polls in more than 40 years.

Polling stations opened first in the east of the vast former Belgian colony in central Africa because of a one-hour time difference with the west where Kinshasa is situated.

The normally sleepy eastern town of Bunia was bustling as about 300 voters lined up outside the main

polling station, guarded by three white UN vehicles.

"I am very excited to be voting, but I can't tell you who for as that is my secret," Francois Xavier, 34, said.

Schools, churches and tents have been transformed into 50,000 polling stations for more than 25 million voters.

More than 17,000 United Nations peacekeepers -- backed by 1,000 European soldiers recently dispatched to the country -- have been deployed to try to ensure voting can take place across a country that is the size of Western Europe.

Those voting in Congo's lawless east did so amid fears of attack by rebels while complaints over irregularities and an opposition boycott have already raised the spectre of violence and a rejection of the results.

Israel presses ahead with its Gaza attacks

AFP, Gaza City

With world attention focused on Lebanon, Israel pursued its second front against Palestinian militants yesterday, levelling two houses and wounding five people in the Gaza Strip a day after killing two militants in the West Bank.

Five Palestinians were wounded in an Israeli air strike on a house belonging to a member of the ruling Islamist Hamas movement, security officials said.

The Israeli army told the owner by telephone an hour

before the strike that his home would be targeted, security officials said.

Another air strike destroyed a house belonging to a member of the Popular Resistance Committees in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. He was also notified of the impending strike beforehand, and no injuries were reported.

An army spokesman said the Gaza City raid was aimed at a "Hamas centre" and the Beit Hanoun raid targeted a weapons storage site.

Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees are two of the three Palestinian militant groups that said they captured Corporal Gilad Shalit in a deadly June 25 cross-border raid.

The raid, which killed two other soldiers, sparked a massive Israeli offensive in Gaza for the first time since it withdrew in 2005 after a 38-year occupation.

According to an AFP count at least 147 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have been killed since the attacks against Gaza began last month.

Somali PM survives no-confidence vote

AFP, Mogadishu

Somalia's Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi yesterday survived a vote of no-confidence on his 18-month-old government that is blamed for performing badly and illegally deploying Ethiopian troops.

Of the 215 lawmakers who voted, 126 approved the motion while 88 opposed it. Under the transitional federal charter, 138 members are required to pass the motion for it to pass.

The parliamentary session was held in a renovated agricultural warehouse in Baldoia town, about 250 kilometres (155 miles) north-

west of the capital Mogadishu, amid high security.

"The vote has ended peacefully and the government of Ali Mohamed Gedi will stay in position," said parliament speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Ahmed.

"I thank you all and show my gratefulness to those who voted to keep the government," he said.

"I equally thank those who voted against me for exercising their diplomatic right peacefully," Gedi told the lawmakers, two days after his government was plunged into a crisis with the resignation of 18 cabinet ministers.