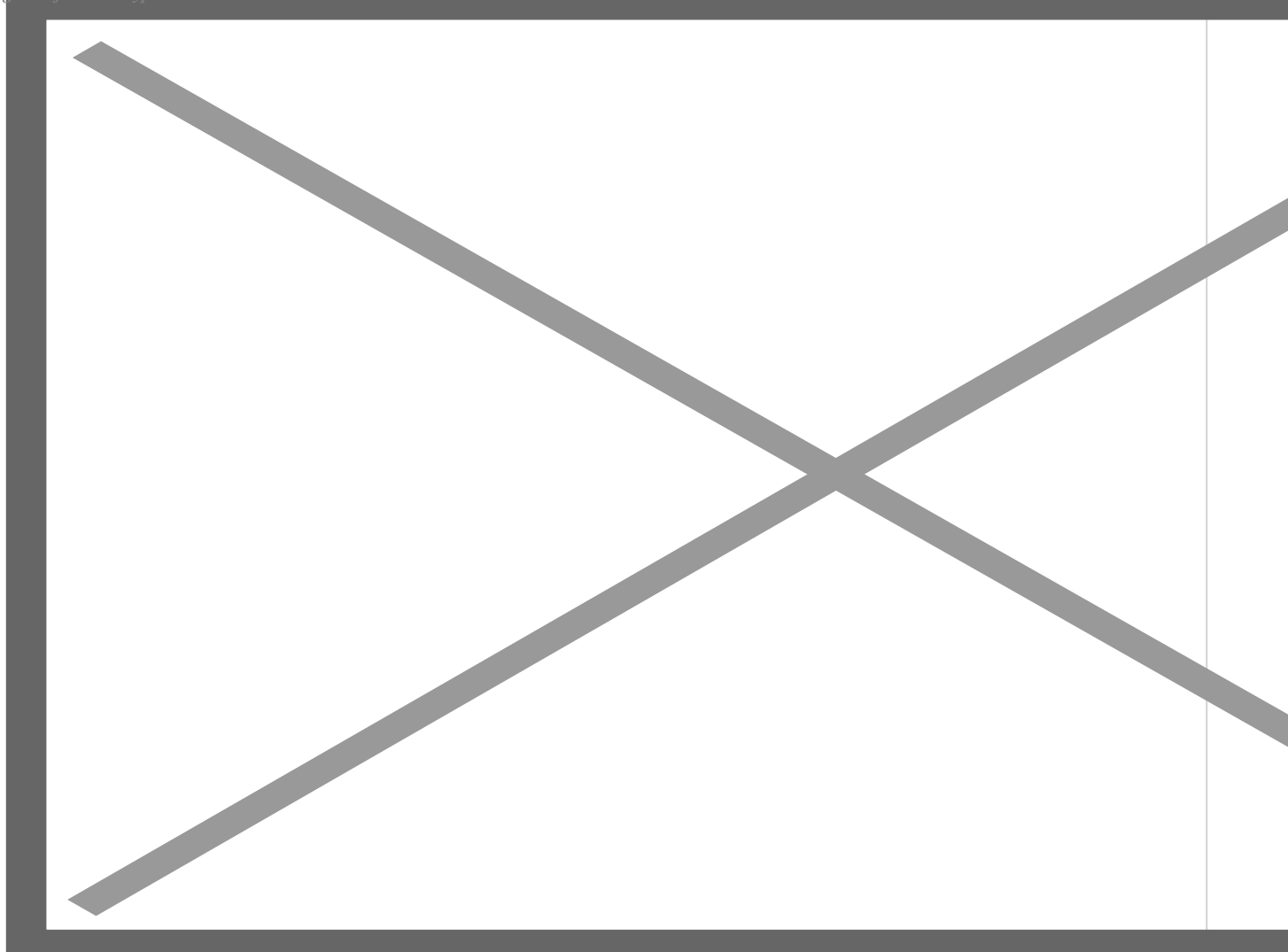


Reporters Without Borders affirms Israel targeted deadly strike on journalists in southern Lebanon

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Beirut, October 30 (RHC)-- An investigation by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has found out that an artillery shelling that killed a Reuters journalist and injured six others in southern Lebanon earlier this month was deliberate and came from Israel.

Video journalist Issam Abdallah, who worked for Reuters, died and six other journalists were wounded -- including two from AFP, one of them seriously -- in the Israeli shelling of the village of Alma al-Shaab in southern Lebanon on October 13.

Qatar-based Al Jazeera said the network's cameraperson Elie Brakhia and reporter Carmen Joukhadar were also among those wounded in the attack.

"The initial findings of the investigation show that the reporters were not collateral victims of the shooting," the RSF said on Sunday, adding, "One of their vehicles, marked 'press', was targeted, and it was also clear that the group stationed next to it was [comprised of] journalists."

Amid the Israeli regime's indiscriminate air blitz in the besieged Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon in past one week, at least 11 Palestinian journalists have been targeted and killed.

Although the RSF did not explicitly name Israel, it added that according to ballistic analysis the shots came from the east of where the journalists were standing; that is, from the direction of Lebanon's border with the 1948 Israeli-occupied territories.

The journalists themselves have been quoted as saying that they believe they were hit by fire coming from the direction of Israel.

Offering more details, the investigation revealed that the journalists had occupied the spot, which was hit by two strikes 37 to 38 seconds apart. The first strike killed Abdallah, while the second and more powerful one ignited the vehicle used by Al-Jazeera TV crew and injured several journalists.

"Two strikes in the same place in such a short space of time, from the same direction, clearly indicate precise targeting," the RSF report said. It added: "It is unlikely that the journalists were mistaken for combatants, especially as they were not hiding: in order to have a clear field of vision, they had been in the open for more than an hour, on the top of a hill." Meanwhile, the report noted, the journalists' bullet-proof vests and the nearby vehicle were marked 'press.'

According to two journalists interviewed by the RSF, an Israeli helicopter had flown over the scene a few seconds before the strikes.

Lebanon's Press Editors' Syndicate condemned what it called the "targeting" of journalists and described the killing of a Reuters video journalist as a "deliberate crime."

The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement also strongly condemned the fatal Israeli attack against journalists in southern Lebanon, stating that the regime's killing of civilians and threats to Lebanon's security will not go unanswered. "We vehemently denounce the occupying Israeli regime's new crime against a journalist team of seven people covering news... near the Israeli enemy's al-Abad site, outside the town of Hula, which resulted in the martyrdom of a civilian," Hezbollah said in its statement.

"This act of aggression comes in line with the occupiers' assaults on members of the press in Lebanon and Palestine, and is meant to prevent exposition of truth to the international community," it added.

In an earlier report, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said since the onset of Israel's brutal war on the densely-populated Gaza Strip on October 7, at least 24 journalists, including 20 Palestinians, have been killed. "Journalists in Gaza face particularly high risks as they try to cover the

conflict in the face of a ground assault by Israeli troops, devastating Israeli airstrikes, disrupted communications, and extensive power outages," the CPJ said.

The regime started its brutal war on Gaza following an operation launched by the coastal territory's resistance groups, dubbed Operation al-Aqsa Storm.

More than 8,000 Palestinians have so far been killed in Israel's deadly military campaign with women, children, and the elderly accounting for some 70 percent of the fatalities.

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