

## **Sask. Muslims, Jews long for peace**

By Anne Kyle  
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As the federal government puts together plans to evacuate Canadian citizens caught in the crossfire in war-torn Lebanon, Saskatchewan-based Muslim and Jewish organizations are hoping for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

"Clearly our concern is for our citizens who are caught in the conflict that has erupted suddenly and no one expected it to happen," said Kashif Ahmed, communications director of Muslims of Peace and Justice.

Israel launched retaliatory air strikes into Lebanon last week after the guerrilla group Hezbollah crossed into Israel Wednesday and captured two of its soldiers.

Characterizing the raid as an act of war, Israel responded by targeting Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon as well as some of the country's roads, ports, radar stations, and bridges.

Hezbollah, in turn, responded by firing rockets into Israel which have landed in Atlit, about 56 kilometres south of the border and in the resort town of Haifa.

As tension in the area grows, so does the number of civilian casualties on both sides of the border. Eight Canadians of Lebanese origin were killed by an Israeli strike on a border town in Lebanon where they were vacationing for the summer.

"Saskatchewan Muslims are shocked by what appears to be the Canadian government's tacit support of Israel's unjustified violence. It is indefensible that Prime Minister (Stephen) Harper called Israel's use of military force "measured" and that he has failed to take the appropriate action to protect innocent Canadians and other civilians caught in this sudden conflict," he said.

Ahmed wanted to know why during last week's G-8 meeting Harper didn't ask Israel to hold off its attacks on Lebanon to protect civilian lives and enable Canadians to be safely evacuated. It is estimated 40,000 Canadians are stranded in war-torn Lebanon.

Hopefully both sides will realize that violence is not going to solve this dispute, Ahmed said, explaining the dispute is between Israel and Hezbollah, not Israel and Lebanon.

"We want both sides to act restrained and to negotiate resolutions to the essential issues in the conflict," Ahmed said.

Israel is very interested in having a peaceful relationship with its neighbours and has tried for years, but some of their neighbours have not been so easy to deal with, said Dr. Alan Ross, president of the Beth Jacob Synagogue in Regina.

"When you have terrorists like Hamas and Hezbollah and all they want to do is wipe Israel off the map it is kind of hard to negotiate peace," Ross said.

When terrorists move into recognized Israeli territory and kidnap some of their soldiers or fire rockets into Israeli territory, the government has no choice but to fight back because it is being attacked, he said.

"Israel has a right to exist and a right to protect itself," Ross said, adding Israel is targeting Lebanese infrastructure -- roads and bridges -- in order to curtail the shipment of weapons to Hezbollah and the movement of the captured Israeli soldiers out of the area.

"To his credit the prime minister has come out in support of Israel recognizing that it was the terrorists who triggered all this activity," he said.

These terrorist organizations need to be suppressed so that peaceful negotiations recognizing Israel as a nation can take place, Ross said.

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