

“You Either Leave Right Now or You Die”—Israel’s Ethnic Cleansing of a Village in Lebanon

Israeli soldiers went door to door in the border village of Ain Arab, forcing residents from their homes at gunpoint as part of a systematic campaign to empty large swathes of southern Lebanon.



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Children from receive food aid at the shelter in Marj al-Zuhoor where their families fled after their expulsion from Ain Arab in southern Lebanon. May 8, 2026. Photo by Osama Rkieh.

BEIRUT, Lebanon—When Lebanon and Israel announced a ceasefire agreement on April 16, Nasreen Abd Elaal and her husband and four children packed their few belongings and departed the public school in Marj al-Zuhoor where they had taken shelter—for the last time, they hoped. They returned the next day to their home in Ain Arab, a small village nestled in the plains near the southern border, where they run a small butcher shop and corner store. That same day, Israeli forces entered the village and established a curfew, warning local residents not to leave their homes after dark before setting up a checkpoint on the exit road leading south.

Twelve days later, Abd Elaal was working behind the counter at the store when she saw a large armored bulldozer lumbering down the road, followed by a swarm of army vehicles carrying, by her estimation, more than one hundred Israeli soldiers. The troops spread through the village, pointed their guns at residents and told them that the village was located within Israel's new "yellow line"—a line demarcating an Israeli zone of control along the southern border inside Lebanese territory that was unilaterally declared by Israel using the same terminology as in Gaza. The soldiers told Abd Elaal and the other village residents that they had two hours to evacuate north.

"They didn't even give us that," Abd Elaal recalled. She rushed home and put her children in their pickup truck, then went back into the house with her husband to pack what they could. They were interrupted by the sound of a car horn and ran back outside to find that an Israeli soldier had opened the door of their vehicle and began honking the horn while their children were sitting inside. "He told us they had orders to empty the village. He said, 'You either leave right now or you die.'" Residents were expelled from the village so rapidly, many weren't even able to lock their front door behind them, Abd Elaal said.

The forced expulsion of Ain Arab—where Israeli soldiers went door to door, forcing residents from their homes at gunpoint—was a striking example of the Israeli military campaign to ethnically cleanse villages across southern Lebanon. Human rights advocates and locals told Drop Site they hadn't heard of a similar incident occurring

this latest phase of the war—the Israeli military typically bombs and shells areas to forcibly displace residents. Over 1.2 million people have been displaced in Lebanon since March 2, and many have no idea if or when they will be able to return to their homes.

Abd Elaal returned with her family to the same school-turned-shelter in the village of Marj al-Zuhoor in the Bekaa Valley where she said four families share one room and water access is intermittent. After studying a map that the Israeli military [published](#) April 19, they found that their village was actually located outside of Israel's "yellow line," prompting a group of men from the village, including Abd Elaal's husband and a local official, to visit an army office in the village of Marjayoun on May 21 to ask if the state could work with UNFIL—the United Nations peacekeeping force stationed in the South—to return them to their lands. When the residents followed up a week later, army officials said they had not been able to secure them safe passage back home.

"To say we are destroyed is not enough," Abd Elaal said. Most villagers lived off of the land, and their expulsion meant that they couldn't prepare the fields for spring planting. "We left our livelihoods in the soil and fled."



Nasreen Abd Elaal outside the school-turned-shelter in Marj al-Zuhoor where she and her family fled after being forced out of their village, Ain Arab, by the Israeli military. May 8, 2026. Photo by Osama Rkieh.

The story of Ain Arab underscores the brutal and sweeping nature of Israel's ongoing military campaign in southern Lebanon, where a flurry of displacement orders are issued daily and lines of advance are drawn and redrawn without regard for civilian land or life. Israel did not adhere to the ceasefire announced in mid-April, and has steadily escalated its air and ground offensive, prompting Hezbollah to wage a campaign of resistance attacks. The Israeli assault moved gradually further north, culminating in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declaring on Sunday that had ordered the Israeli military to strike targets in Beirut's southern suburb of Dahiy prompting thousands to flee the area. The move caused Iran to consider suspending its own ceasefire talks with the U.S. entirely.

On Monday, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Hezbollah had agreed to de-escalate the fighting after he spoke with Netanyahu and Hezbollah through mediators. Trump said no Israeli troops would be "going to Beirut" and that Hezbollah "agreed to stop shooting at Israel." He said Hezbollah had "agreed that a shooting will stop—That Israel will not attack them, and they will not attack Israel." A statement by the Lebanese embassy in Washington on Monday said that Hezbollah had agreed to not attack northern Israel. There was no immediate public statement from Hezbollah.

While the latest arrangement may have prevented another large-scale Israeli attack on the Lebanese capital, the deal did little to stop the fighting in the region south of the Zahrani River and in the Bekaa Valley. A day after Trump's announcement, Israeli forces carried out multiple air strikes on the southern city of Nabatieh and reiterated a warning to all residents in the area to evacuate ahead of more planned attacks. At least eight people were killed, including two children, in Israeli strikes on Tuesday, while Hezbollah also continued launching dozens of projectiles and drones toward Israeli soldiers.

"The villages they issue warnings for are getting hammered," said Abbas Atwe, a medic in the Islamic Health Authority stationed in Nabatieh. "On some days, we see up to airstrikes in some places." He added that while many have left the villages near Nabatieh, thousands remain, either unable to afford renting elsewhere or unwilling to abandon their homes.

The displacement orders typically arrive as lists of villages published by the Israeli military spokesperson on X, which are then disseminated among community Whatsapp groups and on social media. Occasionally, the occupation releases satellite imagery indicating precisely which buildings they plan to target. But in many cases, strikes rain down at random on civilian homes, leading to dozens of casualties a day. Since March 2, the Israeli military assault on Lebanon has killed 3,468 people and wounded more than 10,500 others. Over 600 of those deaths have occurred since the

so-called ceasefire was declared in mid-April. During the last week of May, an average of 11 children were killed or wounded in Israeli attacks every 24 hours, according to UNICEF.

"These don't constitute lawful advance warnings because they don't actually give residents the information they need to know to actually leave," Kristine Bekerle, Amnesty International's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa told Drop Site. Under international law, she added, militaries can only displace residents for their own safety—not to achieve a strategic objective—and are required to ensure both the health and safety of these residents as well as their safe return as soon as the threat to their lives is past. To do otherwise is to commit "the war crime unlawful transfer, which is basically one way of saying forced displacement."

One way to determine whether an army is carrying out unlawful transfer, Bekerle said, is to examine what it is doing to prevent displaced residents from returning. In southern Lebanon, Israel has done so through two methods: the demarcation of its so-called "yellow line," past which Lebanese civilians are barred, and a systematic campaign of mass destruction of civilian property, which ensures that residents have no homes to return to. She described the findings of a forthcoming report from Amnesty, which compares displacement orders issued in the current phase of the war with those issued in 2024. The researchers found that not only are displacement orders far more sweeping and frequent in this round of fighting, but that they are less frequently followed by instructions for exactly which buildings and neighborhoods to evacuate.

"It's just getting worse," Bekerle said.

In one of the largest recent attacks, an Israeli airstrike near Jabal Amel Hospital in the southern city of Tyre (Sour) killed four people, injured nearly 130—including dozens of the hospital's medical, nursing, and administrative staff—and caused extensive damage to the hospital, including cutting off electricity to intensive care units. First responders worked for hours to rescue the injured from the rubble and the nearby

Hayram Hospital issued an urgent call for blood donations. Lebanon's health care system has come under repeated attack by Israel with hospitals being bombed and paramedics and rescue workers being targeted in double- or triple-tap strikes, with [over 120 killed](#) over the past three months.

Mohanad Hage Ali, a research director at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, told Drop Site that vast destruction of civilian property is one of Israel's primary military objectives in southern Lebanon.

"If you look at the Gaza model, it's not really about controlling Hamas; it's about restructuring the geographic surroundings of the state of Israel in ways that would change reality for good," Ali said, adding that so far the Israelis had destroyed approximately 60 villages near the southern border. "You've pushed out Lebanese S who the Israeli security mind equates with Hezbollah, further and further away from Israeli towns and settlements."

Back at the shelter in Marj al-Zuhoor, Abd Elaal yearned to return to her land, where she hoped to find her home still standing. Since they arrived, her infant daughter had been in and out of the hospital battling illness from the cold shelter nights. Abd Ela called on the state and UNIFIL forces to ensure their safe passage back to Ain Arab, before it was too late. While Lebanon and Israel have held several rounds of direct talks in Washington, Israel has refused to withdraw its troops from Lebanon and has only escalated its brutal assault, pushing deeper into Lebanese territory and forcing more people from their homes.

"Nothing is coming from these negotiations. We go to sleep to death and wake up death," Abd Elaal said. "They've destroyed everything. Tell me, what more do they want? What is left?"



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