A new 22-page report published by Amnesty International shows how Israel's destruction of thousands of homes, strikes on numerous bridges and roads as well as water and fuel storage plants was an integral part of Israel's military strategy in Lebanon, rather than "collateral damage" resulting from the lawful targeting of military objectives. The findings point to an Israeli policy of deliberate destruction of Lebanese civilian infrastructure during the recent conflict.

The information reinforces the case for an urgent, comprehensive and independent United Nations inquiry into grave violations of international humanitarian law committed by both Hizbullah and Israel during their month-long conflict.

"Many of the violations identified in this report are war crimes that give rise to individual criminal responsibility," said Curt Goering, Amnesty International USA's Senior Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programs. "They include directly attacking civilian objects and carrying out indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks. People against whom there is prima facie evidence of responsibility for the commission of these crimes are subject to criminal accountability anywhere in the world through the exercise of universal jurisdiction."

Goering is leading an Amnesty International mission to Lebanon to investigate war crimes in the region.

The Israeli government has argued that they were targeting Hizbullah positions and support facilities and that other damage done to civilian infrastructure was a result of Hizbullah using the civilian population as a "human shield."

"The evidence strongly suggests that the extensive destruction of public works, power systems, civilian homes and industry was an integral part of the military strategy, rather than "collateral damage" or the result of lawfully targeting military objectives," added Goering.

The report, Deliberate Destruction or "Collateral Damage"? Israeli Attacks Against Civilian Infrastructure, is based on first-hand information gathered during recent Amnesty International research missions to Lebanon and Israel, including interviews with dozens of victims, officials from the United Nations, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and Lebanese government, as well as

official statements and press reports.

The evidence presented in this publication includes the following:

-- Massive destruction by Israeli forces of whole civilian neighborhoods and villages

-- Attacks on bridges in areas of no apparent strategic importance

-- Attacks on water pumping stations, water treatment plants and supermarkets despite the prohibition against targeting objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population

-- Statements by Israeli military officials indicating that the destruction of civilian infrastructure was indeed a goal of Israel's military campaign designed to press the Lebanese government and the civilian population to turn against Hizbullah.

"The widespread destruction of apartments, houses, electricity and water services, roads, bridges, factories and ports, in addition to statements by Israeli officials, suggests a policy of punishing both the Lebanese government and the civilian population to get them to turn against Hizbullah," said Marty Rosenbluth, Amnesty International USA's Country Specialist for Israel and the Occupied Territories. "Israeli attacks did not diminish, nor did the pattern of attacks appear to change, even when it became clear that the victims of the bombardment were predominantly civilians."

Rosenbluth recently returned from the region on a fact-finding mission. His diaries are available on http://www.amnestyusa.org

Amnesty International is calling for a comprehensive, independent and impartial inquiry to be urgently established by the United Nations into violations of international humanitarian law by both sides in the conflict. It should examine in particular the impact of this conflict on the civilian population, and should be undertaken with a view to holding individuals responsible for crimes

under international law and ensuring that full reparation is provided to the victims.

For a copy of the new publication, "Deliberate Destruction or "Collateral Damage"? Israeli Attacks Against Civilian Infrastructure," please contact the AIUSA press office at 202- 544-0200 ext. 302.