

Reporters describe carnage at Qana

Reports from the southern Lebanese town of Qana have described a scene of carnage, with rescue workers continuing to pull bodies from the ruins of a civilian building.

Early on Sunday morning, as BBC correspondents arrived at the site of the deadliest Israeli strike so far in this conflict, frantic efforts to find survivors were already under way.

Displaced families had been sheltering in the basement of a house in Qana, which was crushed after a direct hit.

The Israeli strike killed at least 54 people, more than half of them children.

The BBC's Jim Muir said that for some of the rescuers, experienced as they were, the emotional impact of finding so many dead children in the ruins was too much.

"As I arrived, they were carrying out on a stretcher the limp body of a young boy of about 10. Many other children were pulled out of the rubble lifeless," our correspondent said.

"That's a Red Cross rescue worker sitting here in the sunshine just sobbing - he's so overcome with emotion here," he added.

'Desperate operation'

The BBC's Fergal Keane got an immediate sense of the destructive impact of the attack even before reaching the missile crater.

"As we drove into the town we saw ambulances coming against us and then at the scene numerous rescue workers from the Lebanese Red Cross and the local civil defence trying to organise, pretty desperately, a rescue operation," our correspondent said.

His early assessment of the casualties was borne out by events: "The number of wounded seems to be quite small and that indicates that very, very few people survived this strike."

Jim Muir had travelled to Qana along the road from Tyre, and said the route had been pitted with bomb craters.

He added: "The three-storey building where families have been sheltering in the basement was crushed sideways into an enormous crater by the Israeli bomb strike - a sight all too familiar throughout south Lebanon today.

"Elsewhere in Qana and along the road up from Tyre, many buildings had been similarly crushed."

Only about a tenth of residents are estimated to remain in Qana, which has been subjected to heavy bombardment by Israeli forces in their conflict with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Those with cars, petrol and the other means to leave have gone, and those left behind tend to be the poor and vulnerable.

The dangers of further bombardment meant that it was not safe for the BBC crews to stay longer than a few minutes in Qana.

Israeli warplanes could be heard flying around the area, and there were many explosions in the middle distance.

[Note: The number of people killed in the Israeli bombing of Qana was later revised. The Washington based human rights group Human Rights Watch investigated the incident and issued a report on 3 August saying that 28 people were known to have died, while 13 people were missing.]



Few people pulled from the destroyed house in Qana were alive

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