# Firefighters Battle Blazes Amid Regional Tensions in Southern Lebanon



### Fires and Conflict: Firefighters in Southern Lebanon Battle Blazes Amid Regional Tensions

AITAROUN, Lebanon — On a recent Thursday morning, fire stations in southern Lebanon's Bint Jbeil district were overwhelmed. Having just subdued a 130-acre forest fire, the firefighters were called to a house ablaze at 2 a.m., both incidents caused by Israeli aerial bombs. Throughout the day, teams combated multiple fires across 15 towns, dealing with ongoing Israeli airstrikes.

Ali Qashaqish, 36, head of field operations, noted the increased frequency of fires, exacerbated by ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. Southern Lebanon, known for its olive, almond, pine, cherry, cherimoya, and avocado orchards, has seen its fire season intensified by both scorching summer temperatures and military conflict.

The current conflict ignited on October 8 after Hezbollah launched rockets into Israel, aligning with Hamas’s assault on southern Israel the day before. Since then, both sides have engaged in daily exchanges, severely affecting areas along the 62-mile border. The death toll includes at least 473 in Lebanon, with 92 civilians, and 27 in Israel, including 10 civilians.

Israeli aerial attacks have employed incendiary munitions including white phosphorus, known for causing severe burns and respiratory damage, and its usage in civilian areas constitutes a breach of international law. Human Rights Watch documented at least 159 instances of such attacks since October.

In Lebanon, fires have razed up to 6,000 hectares, displacing around 160,000 people and causing significant agricultural and economic disruptions. The loss of crops and inability to access fields have hit local farmers hard, leading to a substantial economic downturn estimated at $7 million daily.

In Israel, Hezbollah’s rockets have burned approximately 7,400 acres, displacing 60,000 residents from northern regions. Calls for harsher retaliatory measures against Hezbollah strongholds have been prevalent in Israeli leadership statements.

The prolonged conflict, punctuated by relentless rocket exchanges and aerial attacks, underscores the profound human and economic toll on both Lebanese and Israeli communities, emphasizing the need for a resolution as residents endure the ongoing devastation.