

**Washington, D.C.** - Rep. David Price (NC-04) yesterday led a bipartisan group of his colleagues in calling on the Bush Administration to join with America's allies in seeking an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, accompanied by intensive diplomacy to produce a just and lasting resolution to the conflict. In a letter sent to the President yesterday, the four members of Congress called the Administration's failure to support an immediate ceasefire "strategically naïve," and expressed worries that the continuing conflict is galvanizing anti-Israel sentiment in the region and undermining pro-democracy reformers in the Lebanese government. Price was joined by Reps. James Leach (R-IA-02), Lois Capps (D-CA-23), and Bob Filner (D-CA-51) in sending the letter Friday.

Price and his colleagues placed the blame for the conflict squarely on the unprovoked aggression of Hezbollah, and they affirmed Israel's right to defend its citizens. The letter also urges the Administration to combine the negotiated ceasefire with intensive diplomacy to establish an international military force in southern Lebanon, dismantle Hezbollah's military capabilities, facilitate the return of kidnapped Israeli soldiers, and support a strengthened reform government in Lebanon.

Price recently returned from Lebanon where, as ranking Democrat on the House Democracy Assistance Commission, he was working with the recently elected pro-reform majority to make the parliament a more effective representative institution. He said his experience with the Lebanese reformers gives him hope that, with ongoing support from the international community, Lebanon's government will be able to exercise control over all its territory and join with Israel as a peaceful, democratic nation in a troubled region.

The text of the letter follows.

July 28, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President;

We write to urge you to join our allies in seeking an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, with the understanding that such a ceasefire must be followed by intensive diplomacy to establish an international military force in southern Lebanon, dismantle Hezbollah's military capabilities, facilitate the return of kidnapped Israeli soldiers, and support the ongoing development of an autonomous, democratic government in Lebanon.

This crisis was precipitated by neither Israel nor Lebanon. Hezbollah's unprovoked raid across the internationally recognized border between the two nations, and its subsequent rocket attacks – explicitly aimed at civilian targets – left Israel no choice but to defend itself. But the continuing conflict is costing the lives of innocent civilians on both sides of the border, is destroying Lebanon's infrastructure nationwide, and has the potential to escalate beyond the immediate theater. For these reasons, we cannot allow the current violence to continue.

Press reports have indicated that your Administration would not support a ceasefire agreement until Hezbollah is entirely disabled. We believe this to be strategically naive. All indications suggest that Israel's campaign to root out Hezbollah from southern Lebanon faces far greater challenges than anticipated, and that even several additional weeks of fighting may make little difference in the terms of a ceasefire arrangement. As the New York Times recently reported, "Israeli Army officers are saying that it is probably unrealistic to expect that the military can wipe out Hezbollah's well-hidden and widespread arsenal," even with a prolonged campaign. Moreover, as the conflict drags on, anti-Israel sentiment in Lebanon and in the region is drastically escalating, a development that clearly works against Israel's long-term interests and our own national security interests.

Achieving a ceasefire agreement must be the first step in our diplomatic effort to achieve a just and lasting resolution to the conflict, not the end result. Once a ceasefire is achieved, it is

essential that your Administration work with our allies to achieve a settlement that protects the people of both Israel and Lebanon from threats posed by Hezbollah and external forces. At a minimum, such a settlement should include the return of kidnapped Israeli soldiers and a process for fully dismantling Hezbollah's military capabilities in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559. Our diplomatic efforts must also include a significant U.S. support for the pro-democracy forces that captured the majority in the Lebanese government in the wake of the Cedar Revolution.

It is also clear that a long-term, multi-national security force will be required in Southern Lebanon to monitor a ceasefire and prevent a re-emergence of Hezbollah. Such a force must have significantly greater capabilities and stronger international backing than the current UNIFIL mission. The establishment of a security force, which will be needed in the region until a lasting peace is secured, cannot be accomplished without the assertive leadership, and the strong financial backing, of the United States. Israel has made clear it would welcome a strong multi-national force in southern Lebanon, and we should begin the hard work of assembling it now.

We are acutely aware that the lives of many thousands of Israeli and Lebanese civilians are under constant threat as a result of this conflict, and we mourn the lives that have already been lost. We urge you to act now to prevent the unnecessary loss of additional lives by committing to a long-term U.S. diplomatic engagement in the region, beginning with a call for an immediate ceasefire. We also urge you to give favorable consideration to Rep. Leach's proposal for appointment of a special Middle East peace envoy.

Sincerely,

s/ s/

David Price Lois Capps

s/ s/

Bob Filner James Leach

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