

## Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya criticize Hezbollah "security zone" in Sidon

By Mohammed Zaatari

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SIDON, Lebanon: Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya's political representative in south Lebanon criticized Tuesday a "security zone" set up outside an Hezbollah-affiliated institution in Sidon.

Bassam Hammoud met with various security officials in Sidon to voice his condemnation of allegedly illicit security arrangements made by Hezbollah in and around the Zahraa Congregation.

"Sidon enjoys a good amount of security and stability compared to other areas thanks to the great efforts made by various security forces and the responsibility of Sidon's politicians," said Hammoud, "But some people think they enjoy political cover and are above the law, so they provoke Sidonians by attacking the official security forces."

Hammoud was referring to security measures taken by Hezbollah outside the Zahraa Congregation including the creation of a security zone, which has given rise to a host of allegations that Hezbollah members have arrested and physically assaulted numerous residents and confiscated personal documents.

Hammoud warned there would be consequences for those who created new "security zones" in Sidon, calling for swift action to be taken to curb the phenomenon.

Hammoud compared the measures outside the congregation to those taken up by fugitive Salafist Sheikh Ahmad Assir in Sidon last year, claiming double standards were at play.

"They have bombarded us with criticism about security zones and provocative speeches [made by Sunni preachers] in Sidon," Hammoud added, "But why don't they care to notice similar actions [taken by Hezbollah] today? Or is it that their blind political affiliation has prevented them from telling the truth?"

Assir was a Salafi figure who organized an armed attack against the Army in Sidon last year, leading to the deaths of 18 Army soldiers. Assir's speeches were zealously anti-Hezbollah, calling for a Sunni revolt against Shiite domination in Lebanon.

Hammoud visited, with his deputy Hassan Shammas by his side, the head of Army Intelligence in the south Gen. Ali Shahrou, Internal Security Forces head in the area Sami Shahadeh, head of the ISF Information Branch in the south Abdallah Slim, regional head of the State Security Forces Nawwaf Hassan and the head of General Security's branch in the south Fawzi Chamoun.

Separately, Hammoud discussed with the officials recent events that took place in the Ain al-Helweh refugee camp, where a new elite security force is set to be created.