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Hezbollah says actions in Syria 'national, moral duty'



A senior Hezbollah leader has defended the group's actions in Syria as a "national and moral duty" to defend Lebanese inside the war-torn country, Lebanon's National News Agency reported on Monday. Speaking at a ceremony mourning a Hezbollah fighter killed in Syria, the vice-president of the group's executive council Sheikh Nabil Qauk evoked the plight of Lebanese citizens living in a string of villages inside Syria. "What Hezbollah is doing with regard to this issue is a national and moral duty in the defence of the Lebanese in border villages," the official news agency quoted Qauk as saying. "To those who ask us to allow our brothers in these border villages to be victims of murders, kidnaps, massacres and expulsions, I respond to you: 'Can we leave these Lebanese hostage to this situation?'" he added. "Hezbollah's martyrs are the martyrs of the entire nation because they are defending their Lebanese compatriots," he said. Inside Syria, along the border with Lebanon, are five villages that are home to mostly Lebanese Shiites and another eight that are mixed but have large Shiite populations. Qauk's remarks came as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights watchdog said the Lebanese Shiite group -- a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad -- was leading the fight in the Qusayr area of Syria's central province of Homs. Fierce fighting has raged in the strategic area in recent days, and the newly appointed interim rebel chief George Sabra warned Monday night that Hezbollah's role in the fighting was a "declaration of war."