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Lieutenant Colonel Ariella Mazor
International Spokesperson, Israel Defense Forces
Tel Aviv-Yafo Israel

Paris, October 14, 2026

Subject: Strike of 13 October 2023 in southern Lebanon: three years on, AFP requests precise and substantiated answers from the Israeli authorities

Dear Lieutenant Colonel Mazor,

Three years ago, on 13 October 2023, two successive strikes hit a clearly identified group of seven journalists in southern Lebanon. Reuters videographer Issam Abdallah was killed. AFP photographer Christina Assi lost a leg and continues to suffer from permanent injuries. AFP video journalist Dylan Collins and other journalists were also wounded.

Multiple independent investigations, including those conducted by [AFP](#), Reuters, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists, have established that the strikes were caused by tank shells fired from Israeli positions.

Yet three years on, the Israeli military has still provided no explanation. All responses to our successive formal requests have remained brief, stating only that the “incident” is still under review and that “the conclusions regarding this event have not yet been reached”.

There has nevertheless been a significant development. On 4 June 2026, appearing on the French television programme *Complément d’Enquête*, broadcast on France 2, Israel’s Ambassador to France stated on several occasions that the strike was “a mistake” (all quotes are our translation). He said that “it was a mistake, clearly”, that the journalists “were not targeted because they were journalists”, but because “the soldiers on the ground thought they were terrorists”. Asked directly whether this amounted to a “bavure” (a French term for a serious error by armed or security forces causing unjustified harm to civilians), he replied: “Yes, we say it very clearly.”

In our view, these remarks amount to the first public acknowledgment by an official Israeli representative that the strikes were carried out by Israeli forces. It is, however, through a French television programme, and not through a direct response to our formal requests, that we learned of this position.

On 5 June 2026, AFP wrote to the Ambassador to request precise and substantiated answers on what he himself described as a “mistake”. That letter, which AFP has made public on [afp.com](https://www.afp.com), has remained unanswered to this day.

On 12 October 2026, on the eve of the third anniversary of the strikes, the Israel Defense Forces sent a statement to AFP’s Jerusalem bureau. It states that the IDF “does not target journalists” and that the incident “has been referred to the General Staff Fact-Finding Assessment Mechanism for a comprehensive factual review”, whose findings will then be submitted to the Military Advocate General’s Corps, “which will assess whether further action is required”. The IDF also says it “regrets any harm caused to journalists”.

We take note of this statement, which identifies the bodies in charge of the review. It nevertheless provides no explanation of what happened, no timeline for the review and no acknowledgment of responsibility. Expressing regret for “any harm caused to journalists” is not the same as acknowledging that Israeli forces caused that harm, something Israel’s own Ambassador to France has publicly accepted.

Given your responsibilities, you are in a position to provide the answers that AFP has been seeking for three years. I would therefore like to submit the following questions:

1. Do the Ministry of Defense and the Israel Defense Forces endorse the Ambassador’s statement that the 13 October 2023 strike was “a mistake”? If so, why does the IDF statement of 12 October express regret for “any harm caused to journalists” without acknowledging that Israeli forces caused it, and why has no formal acknowledgment of responsibility been made to AFP, to Christina Assi, to Dylan Collins or to the family of Issam Abdallah, all of whom are seeking justice?
2. Investigations have established that an Israeli military drone repeatedly overflew the group of journalists in the 25 minutes preceding the strike, and that an Apache helicopter also passed overhead. How do you explain that this prolonged surveillance failed to correctly identify civilians wearing “PRESS” vests and helmets, in an open area, with a vehicle also marked “PRESS” and clearly visible from the air?
3. The Ambassador referred to the discovery of vests marked “PRESS” in tunnels belonging to Hamas and Hezbollah as part of the rationale for the strikes. This claim had never previously been made by any representative of the Israeli military in this case. Do you consider this argument relevant, and on what basis? It does not in any way absolve the Israeli military, which struck a group of seven clearly identified journalists after prolonged aerial surveillance of the area.
4. According to the IDF statement of 12 October, the incident has been referred to the General Staff Fact-Finding Assessment Mechanism, whose findings will then be

submitted to the Military Advocate General's Corps. When was the incident referred to this mechanism? What stage has its review reached, three years on from the events? When will its findings, and any decision by the Military Advocate General's Corps, be communicated to AFP and to the journalists affected?

5. Have the investigations conducted by AFP, Reuters, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists been considered as part of the Fact-Finding Assessment Mechanism's review? If so, what conclusions have been drawn? If not, why not?
6. What steps does Israel intend to take to establish responsibility, ensure justice and provide redress for the journalists affected by the strikes and for the family of Issam Abdallah?

Three years after the strikes, the journalists affected and the family of Issam Abdallah are still waiting for an explanation. I would therefore be grateful for a written response to these questions or, alternatively, for a meeting between myself, AFP's Jerusalem bureau and representatives of the Israeli military.

In the interest of transparency, this letter is public and has been published on [afp.com](https://www.afp.com). AFP will continue to seek the truth on what happened on 13 October 2023.

Yours sincerely,

Phil Chetwynd
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