

# Mobilians back from Mideast claim Israel misrepresented

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Press Register Reporter

"I would say the news media are not telling the whole story" about Israel's bombing within Lebanon, Mobilian Mary Filben said Saturday after returning from the Middle East.

Mrs. Filben and her husband Paul were among 53 Americans who spent three days last week in Israel and Lebanon under the sponsorship of the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, based in New York.

The national Christian organization is rather new, according to Filben, who described the Christians in the group as diverse, ranging from "the ultra-progressive to the most fundamental."

The National Christian Leadership Conference invited the Filbens to take the trip at the recommendation of several leaders of Jewish-Christian dialogue on a national level in the United States.

The Filbens are Catholic laypersons who are involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue in Mobile and also nationally.

At the outset of a Press Register interview, Filben said the organization that sponsored the Middle East trip "is, as its name suggests, for Israel," but the Filbens said their trip has convinced them that Israel has been

misrepresented by the U.S. news media.

Filben said U.S. news reports have referred to Israel's nine weeks of bombing within Lebanon as "an invasion of Lebanon. An invasion occurs by its very definition when you intend to take and keep territory. This is not the case because the Israelis will move out of Lebanon as quickly as they can."

Prime Minister Menachem Begin and other Israeli leaders spoke to the American group, emphasizing that the Israelis have "not taken one inch of land" in Lebanon, according to the Filbens.

Filben said the impression given in news reports is that a massacre is taking place in Lebanon at the hands of the Israelis. "I don't mean to infer that there is not destruction and that there are not innocent casualties. I have no doubt that there are, and I think that's tragic."

Filben added, however, that the bombs are targeted at strongholds of the Palestine Liberation Organization forces in an attempt to rout the PLO from Lebanon. "There is not wholesale bombing" by Israel.

Filben said, "The PLO has lost the war militarily and PLO leaders know that, but the PLO is a sophisticated network of very smart people, and it's obvious they intend to win the psychological and media war. What they're doing is making sure press coverage is anti-Israel."

"The PLO leaders are using as their screens nurseries, hospitals, schools, churches and civilian homes (in Lebanon), and those are the places they are setting up their headquarters."

According to the Filbens, they visited Tyre, Sidon and Damur, cities on the western coast of Lebanon, where they walked the streets and talked freely to English-speaking Palestinians and

Lebanese, who repeatedly referred to the Israeli soldiers as their liberators.

When reminded that polls released this past week by the Associated Press news service and Newsweek magazine reveal that a majority of Americans oppose Israel's bombing within Lebanon, Filben said that "most Americans are not aware of the alternative Israel faces."

The Mobilian said, "The alternative is that the PLO will not only win the psychological war but the military war as well because they will have time to encourage Syrian, Soviet and Libyan help.... There is a clear-cut verbalized and written commitment by the PLO to push Israel into the sea."

Regardless of how the present conflict in Lebanon ends, Newsweek magazine points out that what has become known as the "Palestinian problem" remains. About 4.4 million Palestinians in the Middle East are displaced, having no homeland.

In his speech to the Americans, Begin acknowledged the Palestinian problem and in fact called it Israel's problem, according to Filben. Begin said Israelis would like to be free to help solve the problem, but PLO leaders have voiced unwillingness to talk because their only objective is to push Israel into the sea.



**BACK FROM MIDDLE EAST** — Mobilians Mary and Paul Filben returned this weekend from a three-day visit in Israel and Lebanon under the auspices of the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, based in New York. (Mobilian Press Register photo by Victor Calhoun)