

## **'Hizbollah fund' charge enrages Argentine Jews**

By Jude Webber in Buenos Aires

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Allegations that Argentina's Arab community is sending money to Hizbollah have incensed Jewish groups, in a country where memories are still raw of two deadly bomb attacks on Jewish targets in the 1990s blamed on the Lebanese militia.

"There is a bank account, opened by the Lebanese embassy, and anyone who can is collaborating, with both cash and humanitarian aid," Yaoudat Brahim, president of the Federation of Argentine Arabic Groups in Buenos Aires, told the Financial Times.

"We want the reconstruction of Lebanon to be as swift as possible – it was wiped off the map," he said of the 33-day war between Israel and Hizbollah, in which some 1,300 people died.

Argentina's La Nacion newspaper last week quoted Muafak Jammal, whom it described as a Hizbollah leader, as saying: "Money is arriving from Argentina for Hizbollah . . . Money is coming not just from Argentina's Muslim community but also from Christians who are Lebanese and are committed to the reconstruction effort."

The US-based Jewish human rights group, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has urged clarification from the Argentine government about the destination of any cash raised. It said Buenos Aires was bound by international conventions to prevent funding of terror groups.

Such activity would be an affront to the memory of the victims of the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy and the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish centre, which killed 107 people and were blamed on Hizbollah, he added.

Hicham Hamdan, Lebanon's ambassador to Argentina, denied that any of the money would go to Hizbollah. "The money will go to the central bank and the Lebanese government," he said. He declined to comment on how much had been raised so far, but said it was a "very humble" amount and no transfer had yet been made.

Luis Grynwald, president of the AMIA Jewish centre, said he would not be surprised if cash raised in Argentina were helping fund the group. He pointed to increased US-supported security and intelligence efforts in the leaky tri-border area between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay as evidence of Washington's suspicions that funds from the region's notorious money-laundering and counterfeiting operations were being funnelled to radical Islamic groups.

Security analysts also believe the area is a Latin American hideout for terror cells.