



**Statement of UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon
UN Member States Briefing
Chaired by the ERC and the Lebanon Permanent Representative in NY
Monday 10 August 2020**

Secretary General,
Excellency, President of the GA,
ERC and WFP Executive Director,
Representatives of United Nations Member States,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am addressing you today, with a heart full of sorrow, from a small country in the Middle East. A country that has struggled a lot and yet still has the will, beyond all odds, to survive and strive.

Six days ago, on Tuesday 4 August at 6PM, a warehouse at the Beirut Port exploded shattering the city, and the hearts of the people of Lebanon, and pushing them further to the brink. Reports indicate that over 150 people were killed, and an additional 5,000 people were injured. Damage is extensive and not restricted to the port area. It has affected the city at the center of the economic activity, destroying numbers of commercial and residential neighborhoods. Within seconds, all we know of Beirut has been replaced by apocalyptic images of destruction, fear and sorrow.

Beyond Geymayzeh, Achrafieh and Hamra, other areas such as Geitawi, Karantina, Bourj Hammoud, Nabaa and Karm el Zeytoun, where large number of underprivileged families are living in often overcrowded conditions, have also been heavily damaged. As a consequence, scores of families, 300,000 according to Government preliminary estimates, have been left homeless – now displaced with



families and friends, or for many, still living in their damaged and sometimes dangerously affected homes.

Sadly, beyond Beirut, it is the functioning of the entire country which has been affected. Let me give you an idea of the impact and magnitude of the crisis on people's lives:

- At least 15 medical facilities, including three major hospitals, sustained partial or heavy structural damage – at the worst possible time; as COVID-19 cases are peaking. Damage to primary health care centers are also jeopardizing routine health services, including for children. This is compounded by structural damage of the blast on a Ministry of Health warehouse, putting the stock of acute and chronic medicines, as well as vaccines, at immediate risk of being damaged or unusable.

- 120 schools have been damaged – straining further the chance of 50,000 children to go back at the beginning of the school year. This adds to the trauma of the 80,000 children whom, as estimated by UNICEF, are now displaced.

- The port, which handles 80% of the country imports, has been *de facto* rendered inoperable. 120,000 metric tons of the country's staple food stocks stored at the port — including wheat, soy and other beans— have been destroyed along with the grain silos. There is now 4-6 weeks of grain reserves in-country – much less than the standard 3-month supply to ensure food security.

The explosions happened as Lebanon faces a multi-faceted crisis. In recent months, economic contraction, increasing poverty and rising prices have compounded needs among Lebanese and non-Lebanese communities, including the large refugee population in Lebanon. Social tensions continue to grow in many parts of the country. And the crisis that has ensued has led the traumatized people to be less attentive to COVID-19 preventive measures.



In such a challenging context, and as the explosions have also affected the aid community in Lebanon, I would like to commend the engagement and the work of the national and international NGOs, as well as the United Nations personnel, who have been involved in the response from the very first moment, demonstrating a remarkable sense of service and dedication to save lives.

The United Nations and NGOs in country are engaged in concerted and coordinated efforts to support the national response to the explosions. We have activated an Emergency Operation Cell with representatives from the United Nations, local and international NGOs, Red cross/Red crescent movement and operational donors to support an effective collective response.

Let me share with you some key points on what we have done so far:

A total of 14 USAR teams from 11 countries have been deployed, in addition to other specialized teams, including engineers and environmental experts. Rapid environmental assessments are ongoing. A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has deployed to support the Government to coordinate the response and provide surge support for OCHA in-country.

Rapid assessments of damage on hospitals and primary health care were undertaken. Primary health care, mental health support and mobile medical teams have been prioritized. Assistance for more than 1,000 trauma cases was provided, including through Emergency Medical Teams. More than 1,000 surgical interventions were undertaken. Medical equipment and supplies, including PPEs, have been procured. The relocation of all medicines and supplies from the damaged MoPH's warehouse in Quarantina near the blast site has been completed. Stockpiling has been ensured in a safe and adapted location inside the Rafik Hariri University Hospital premises.



Mobile Medical Units are being used as an outreach to target people with specific needs and older people mainly.

Youth Volunteers, including 300 mobilized by UNICEF, are removing debris across affected areas to facilitate peoples' return to their homes. Some emergency shelter kits are being distributed while a limited number of temporary collective shelters have been set up.

Assessments are ongoing in coordination with Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BML) Water Establishment to understand the impact on infrastructures. The Port pumping station was re-operated by the BML Water Establishment the day after the blast. Hygiene kits and baby kits are being distributed. Water trucking and desludging is provided in LRC support points.

WFP has allocated an additional 5,000 food parcels for families affected by the blasts. Each parcel is sufficient to feed a family of five for one month. A number of local NGOs and CSOs are operating street kitchens and serving hot meals, alongside many private initiatives.

Work is ongoing to ensure all children who had been separated from their families in the blast have been reunited. Psychosocial support is available and being offered. ICRC is supporting families still searching for their loved ones.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of generosity and solidarity, everyone should stand behind the people of Lebanon. Those people, who have welcomed Palestinian and Syrian refugees with open arms and open hearts for years and years, deserve our full support.



I thank you very much for your time and for this opportunity to share with you what I have been witnessing from the tragedy affecting the people of Beirut.

Secretary General, Mark, David, I take the opportunity to thank you for the support that has come from the entire United Nations system towards the country team in Lebanon. This, as well as the solidarity that has been expressed by countries around the world, has been heartwarming and a testimony that Lebanese are not left on their own.

The United Nations and its partners in Lebanon are here to stay and deliver. We own it to the people of Lebanon.

Thank you,