

UNITED NATIONS
RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST



NATIONS UNIES
OFFICE DE SECOURS ET DE TRAVAUX POUR LES
REFUGIES DE PALESTINE DANS LE PROCHE-ORIENT

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To: Commissioner General, HQ (Gaza)
From: Director of UNRWA Affairs, Lebanon
Subject: **Situation Report 23 August, 2006**

Executive Summary:

- The Israeli army set up a checkpoint at the entrance of the southern town of Rab al-Salaseen and seized two Lebanese citizens.
- Lebanese security officials said Israeli military fired artillery into the village of Chebaa, which is controlled by Lebanon.
- One Israeli soldier was killed and 3 others were wounded when their tank hit a landmine in South Lebanon – Israeli media reports it was an old IDF mine.
- Intense negotiations to form peacekeeping force while Assad warns against deploying such forces on the border with Syria.

Security Situation:

Peacekeeping force: Despite intense negotiations since a truce took effect on August 14 and warnings that it could unravel if peacekeepers fail to deploy quickly, few European countries have made firm commitments to contribute to the multinational force. On Friday, an extraordinary meeting of EU foreign ministers is to be held in Brussels to discuss contributions to the expanded force with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. According to the Lebanese press, Annan is expected to visit Lebanon over the weekend or early next week.

Draft rules of engagement the U.N. force would allow troops to open fire in self-defense, protect civilians and back up the Lebanese army in preventing foreign forces or arms from crossing the border, according to a leaked U.N. document.

Meanwhile, Syrian President Bashar Assad warned that a deployment of a multinational force along his country's border as demanded by Israel would be considered a hostile action. Assad warned deploying international troops along Lebanon's border with his country would be tantamount to "a withdrawal of Lebanese sovereignty and a hostile position," Assad was quoted as saying in an interview to be aired on Wednesday.

Lebanon still under blockade: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has conditioned the lifting of Israel's air and sea blockade of Lebanon on the deployment of international troops at the Beirut airport and along the Syrian border. Premier Fouad Saniora urged US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in telephone conversations to pressure Israel to lift its blockade.

The Lebanese government has condemned the blockade, saying it violates the UN cease-fire resolution, and the foreign minister Fawzi Salloukh Tuesday called on the international community to force Israel to end the blockade. The cabinet met late Monday but did not publicly challenge the blockade, although it called the siege one of Israel's "terrorist practices."

Minister of labor Trad Hamadeh (a Hizbullah minister) said on Tuesday that the government may attempt to break the Israeli naval and air blockade of Lebanon by calling on ships and aircraft to travel to Lebanese ports without prior Israeli approval. He added that "Entry to Lebanon by sea and from air is a matter of sovereignty.... the Lebanese must be free to enter their country at will. We cannot accept the siege and blackmail."

Since the cease-fire took hold Aug. 14, the only land routes in and out of the country -- to Syria -- have reopened after temporary repairs. Commercial flights to Beirut airport have been allowed only to and from Amman, Jordan, an Arab state with a peace treaty with Israel. The Israelis have said the blockade continued as a weapon against Hizbullah rearmament.

Larsen says security situation in Lebanon vulnerable: The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559, Terje Roed-Larsen said on 22 August that "until the Lebanese force is completely deployed and has asserted its full authority and until there is a robust peacekeeping force there and the necessary cooperation is established, there will be up to a point a security vacuum".

Political situation:

Dutch Foreign Minister visits Lebanon: "no Israeli second round": The Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot visited Lebanon and met with his Lebanese counterpart Fawzi Salloukh and PM Saniora. Bot said that the Israeli officials told him during his meetings in Israel that "there will be no second round of war". The Netherlands have ruled out contributing any ground troops to the multinational force but are discussing with the Lebanese other ways to help. The Lebanese government asked the Netherlands to contribute naval support to an expanded UN peacekeeping force in the South. No decision has been made yet on how many and what kind of ships might be sent but the issue is under consideration.

Lebanon to sue Israel for the war: The Lebanese state has started to study the possible legal procedures to sue Israel and its political and military leaders within the international legal arena for crimes committed by Israel against Lebanon. Justice Minister Charles Rizk headed a meeting with some of Lebanon's top magistrates and legal experts Monday. The meeting dealt with "the Israeli aggression file, which includes war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the best possible ways to legally pursue Israel and force it to pay compensations."

Environmental situation:

Greenpeace: Lebanon oil spill cleanup may take a year: Cleanup of a massive oil spill caused by Israeli air strikes on a fuel depot could take up to one year, according to the environmental group Greenpeace. The pictures released showed oil that had sunk to the seabed, pointing to the urgent need for an immediate and comprehensive assessment of the pollution.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that between 10,000 and 15,000 Tons (11,000-16,500 tons) of fuel oil leaked from an electric power plant bombed south of Beirut by Israel last month.

Humanitarian Situation

There is a real sense amongst humanitarian agencies that, subject to the ceasefire holding, we will be moving out of the emergency humanitarian assistance phase within a matter of weeks and into an early recovery stage. This is also clearly the approach of the Lebanese Government.

It is apparent that, even with a partial Israeli occupation of certain areas in the South, people in those areas are still returning to their homes.

UNRWA

In Nahr El Bared camp, two palrefs prevented the relief staff from opening their office, protesting the cancellation of their registration as SHCs. Contacts were made with local notables and the office was reopened at 8:30 a.m.

In Saida area, all health centers are operating except Nabatieh Health Center, which remains closed after it sustained heavy damage during the war.

We submitted our draft revised Flash Appeal to OCHA in Beirut yesterday evening.

UNRWA in the press

An Nahar Daily carried out today 23 August, an article about Palestinian camps that accommodated Lebanese displaced families. The article said that one of the reasons for choosing Palestinian camps is that the Director of UNRWA in Lebanon received a letter from the UN that mentioned three red zones that would be protected from Israeli raids, including UNRWA offices inside and outside the camps, international organizations and foreign embassies - as well as Palestinian camps unless the Palestinians participate in the fight. This is not true.



Richard J. Cook