**HC Media Talking Points**

**Updated 13 August 2020**

**Top Lines**

* Like so many others around the world, I have been deeply shocked by this devastating event. I send my profound condolences to the families of those killed, and heartfelt wishes to those injured for their quick recovery.
* The scale of the loss is so vast that every single person in Lebanon has been touched by the explosion, as has Lebanon’s large diaspora around the world.
* I, like other members of the UN family, was in Beirut that night and saw firsthand the destruction and the fear. I also saw communities and neighbours reach out to each other with love, generosity and compassion. Even as they have mourned, the strength and dignity of the people of Lebanon has been a shining light in the darkness. Thousands have come together to volunteer to clean streets and homes, remove rubble, distribute meals, visit the elderly, and provide comfort.
* According to local authorities, the explosion at the port of Beirut has so far claimed the lives of more than 200 people. More than 5,000 are estimated to have been injured. In an instant, entire neighbourhoods were shattered beyond recognition. Over 120 schools were damaged, as were 15 medical facilities, including three hospitals. Thousands of homes were also lost, leaving many displaced. Around 80,000 children lost their homes and have been deeply traumatized.
* The United Nations is committed to supporting Lebanon at this difficult time and is working around the clock to support all ongoing response efforts. We quickly mobilized teams to support search and rescue operations, emergency medical needs and alleviate the immediate suffering. The UN stands in solidarity with the people of Lebanon and is here to stay and deliver. It is our priority to ensure humanitarian assistance goes directly to the people who need it and to support the process of rebuilding, and eventually to economic recovery.
* The blast was another cruel blow to a country already facing economic hardship, civil unrest, the Coronavirus outbreak, and carrying a heavy burden from the Syrian refugee crisis. Right now, hundreds of new COVID-19 cases are being announced every day, at a time when the health facilities have been damaged in the blast and overwhelmed with victims. Lebanon was already a country under enormous strain.
* Despite everything, the people of Lebanon have been generous and unwavering hosts to millions of refugees. It is time for the international community to be generous in turn and demonstrate our solidarity with real and tangible commitment.
* We urge donors to give speedily and generously. I released US $9 million from the Lebanese Humanitarian Fund and the ERC has released an addition $5 million from the CERF. I welcome the rapid action of the Paris conference, co-hosted by the UN and France, where donors pledged US $294 million, in addition to a further $30 million from European Commission, alongside other support from Member States.
* However the road ahead will be difficult, and long. We need robust, long-term international support for all people in need in Lebanon. This is a moment to stand by families in need, and to do whatever we can to ensure there is a better future. No one must be left behind.

**New points of interest (as of 13 August)**

* A Flash Appeal will be launched on 14 August. Specific details will be available on the day; however it is clear the priority needs are in shelter, health services, and livelihoods, including access to food.
* At this stage, food shortages are not anticipated, noting that WFP is bringing into the country a 3-month supply of wheat flour and grains for bakeries and mills
* In other encouraging news, the container terminal at Beirut Port re-commenced operations on 12 August at approximately 30 per cent capacity. The first ships have already docked. Capacity is expected to increase over the coming week.
* While these are positive developments, increased numbers of families will still need support to put food on the table. Skyrocketing inflation and unemployment meant many simply could not afford the basics, even before the explosion. The impact of the explosion on the economy will likely mean even more children will go to bed hungry if assistance is not provided.
* COVID-19 is a significant concern. As of 12 August, 7,413 total cases had been recorded, but worryingly 50 per cent of that have been diagnosed in the past two weeks. With physical distancing made even more difficult as a result of the blast, this number may well continue to sharply rise.

**Background**

**The Impact**

* On 4 August, at approximately 18h00 (local time), a warehouse at the Beirut Port containing large quantities of ammonium nitrate exploded. After an initial explosion, a subsequent blast caused widespread damage. Buildings up to 8km away reported extensive substantial damage.
* On 5 August, the Government of Lebanon declared a two-week state of emergency in Beirut. Some of the most affected neighbourhoods include Ashrafiyeh, Central district, Gemmayzeh, Marfa and Mar Mikhail.
* As of 11 August, officials have stated that more than 200 people were killed, and an estimated 5,000 people were injured. Dozens remain missing.
* Initial assessments indicate that at least 12 primary health care centres have been severely damaged. At least three hospitals have been rendered partially or fully inoperable.
* An additional 120 schools, used by 55,000 Lebanese and non-Lebanese children, sustained various levels of damage.
* The blasts destroyed an estimated 120,000 metric tonnes of food stocks, including wheat, soy and other staples. Grain silos at the port were also heavily damaged in the explosions.
* All imports and exports have been redirected to the Tripoli Port, which is about 85 kilometres north of Beirut. The Beirut Port is expected to be inoperable for at least one month, pending repairs, debris removal and safety clearances.
* On 12 August, a total of 292 new COVID-19 cases were recorded. The emergency in Beirut has caused many COVID-19 precautionary measures to be relaxed, raising the prospects of even higher transmission rates and a large caseload in the coming weeks.
* The explosions come 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. Increasing COVID-19 transmission is straining the country’s health systems.

**The response - Overview**

* An Emergency Operation Cell with representatives from the United Nations, local and international NGOs, Red cross/Red crescent movement and operational donors was immediately activated.
* Expert teams were deployed within hours, including:
  + Emergency medical teams to support the ongoing medical response;
  + A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team comprising 19 experts to support coordinated response operations;
  + 14 urban search and rescue teams from 11 countries, under the auspices of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) network, to support the search for survivors as well as structural assessment efforts; and
  + Other specialized teams, including engineers and environmental experts.
* Assessments are ongoing, including shelter, food supply and market/functionality accessibility.
* A flexible coordination structure will facilitate the delivery of emergency assistance to the most vulnerable and support transition towards subsequent phases of the response.
* The United Nations has released $15 million to support ongoing emergency operations.
  + The Emergency Relief Coordinator released $6 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support trauma care and other urgent support to hospitals, repair damaged homes and logistic requirements.
  + The UN Humanitarian Coordinator released $9 million from the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF) to support ongoing efforts.
* UN agencies are on the ground providing continuous support to affected communities. This includes:
  + UNFPA’s partners have distributed dignity kits to an estimated 2,000 adolescent girls and women. Forty frontline social workers have been trained to provide psychological first aid to women affected by the Beirut blast.
  + Hot meals for 30,000 people were distributed at UNHCR tents along with food kits for 700 persons. Another 40 persons received NFI kits and 133 received hygiene kits. Health services and medicines are also being distributed at the Mobile Health Clinic.
  + UNICEF is supporting 720 children and adults with Psychological First Aid through face to face sessions, phone calls, and visits to families and provided 10 counseling sessions.
  + WFP has prepared 150,000 food parcels to distribute to families impacted by the economic crisis and COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, WFP will scale up its existing cash assistance programme in Lebanon that already serves more than 100,000 people ten-fold to reach up to 1 million people across the country including residents directly affected by the blast.

**A Three-Phased Response**

* The humanitarian response has been swift and wide-ranging. It is just the first phase in what will be three phases of response.
* The second – recovery and reconstruction – will cost billions of dollars and require a mix of public and private finance.
* The third element is responding to the Lebanon’s pre-existing socio-economic crisis which has been exacerbated by COVID-19. The blast will have repercussions far beyond what we see right now.
* Donors, international financial institutions and the wider international community need to work collectively and with committed action.

**Question and Answer**

***Has the UN made an assessment of the financial aid needed 1) for emergency needs 2) for reconstruction?***

Assessments are still ongoing across multiple sectors—food, health, water and sanitation, protection, etc.—both for emergency needs and recovery and reconstruction. More time will be required to complete these assessments and estimate the associated costs, particularly given the scale of damage in the port and surrounding areas. The United Nations and partners are coordinating with local authorities to expedite these assessments to inform the ongoing emergency and recovery response.

***What mechanisms will be applied to make sure the money will be directed to independent international and local organizations only and how would you coordinate the response from all these organizations?***

Under my leadership, a flexible and nimble emergency coordination structure has been established to build on existing humanitarian capacities. Further personnel are being surged, both from the UN and NGOs, to support ongoing efforts to reach the most vulnerable populations.

***What are the priority needs?***

The immediate needs are considerable—the most vulnerable populations need assistance with food, health, shelter, water and sanitation just to meet basic needs.

More widespread needs are also apparent to equip hospitals and clinics to continue delivering health services. The national grain reserve needs to be replenished, as the blast destroyed large stocks, to ensure adequate food security. Hundreds of schools require repairs to ensure classes resume on time.

Furthermore, even before the explosion, COVID-19 posed an even greater health burden on Lebanon. This remains a significant risk in Lebanon, particularly in areas were social distancing and other precautions are more difficult after the explosion.

As part of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, the UN and partners to continues to deliver essential humanitarian services to thousands of Lebanese and non-Lebanese people in need.

***What action is OCHA taking in response?***

Similar to humanitarian crises around the world, OCHA is working to support the Humanitarian Coordinator in helping to coordinate wider humanitarian response efforts.

OCHA is coordinating the deployment of experts from the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) to support first responders in Beirut. Additional emergency teams continue to arrive from around the world to help mount a coordinated humanitarian response.

OCHA is also coordinating with NGOs and UN agencies to assess ongoing humanitarian assistance that the UN and their partners will continue to provide.

OCHA is leading UN efforts to mobilize funds to support ongoing emergency and recovery activities. A Flash Appeal will be launched on 14 April.

US$9 million from the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund and an additional $6 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) have been released to address immediate needs and with a focus on strengthening the capacity of existing hospitals, including by expanding and establishing additional Intensive Care Units where needed, and providing needed equipment and supplies.

***UN personnel and dependents injured or killed?***

There have been two fatalities amongst the family members of the UN. About 100 of staff and dependents were injured, including about 22 injuries of UNIFIL personnel from the Maritime Task Force.

***Evacuation of UN staff planned?***

No, UN staff are not preparing to evacuate Beirut or Lebanon. Teams continue to stay and deliver, with the support of additional staff arriving on surge from around the region and other duty stations.

***Impact on movement of aid workers and supplies? And How deliveries of aid to Syria will be affected?***

Beirut Port was heavily damaged and requires repairs, debris removal and safety clearances. Its closure will add to already growing pressure on food insecurity, as Lebanon imports 80 to 85 per cent of its food.

The UN and its partners are looking to adjust logistic networks to ensure sustained operations. Encouragingly, on 12 August the container terminal at Beirut Port recommenced operations at around 30 per cent capacity. Humanitarian materials are also being redirected through the Tripoli Port, which has about a third of the capacity of Beirut Port. Beirut International Airport remains open for passenger and cargo flights.