

Situation update, 23 May 1500hrs

- General update

The situation in Nahr El Bared camp remains tense but calm. The ceasefire that was agreed by the Lebanese Army and Fatah al Islam yesterday afternoon remains in place, despite some sporadic gunfire and fighting. Lebanese soldiers continue to control movement in and out of the camp but Palestinian civilians are able to leave and are doing so in large numbers. UNRWA estimates that up to 10,000 persons, over 25 % of the camp population, may have already evacuated, on foot and by vehicle. UNRWA is extremely concerned about the security of those families that remain in the camp. Many of those who have fled have sought refuge in Beddawi camp, located 5km to the north of Tripoli. UNRWA has opened displacement centres inside its seven schools and the Lebanese government has opened an exhibition centre in Tripoli; other displaced persons are being housed with friends and relatives in and around Tripoli. UNRWA has made distributions of food and non-food supplies to IDPs in its school and the Tripoli exhibition centre, in coordination with local NGOs. An additional convoy is on its way to Beddawi. Today UNRWA has been in contact with the Future Foundation which has pledged to make 18,000 sqm of floor space available in a centre in Tripoli to house displaced families. Meanwhile, UNRWA health services in the camp, intended to serve the resident population of around 15,000, have been expanded and the Agency is working to establish mobile health services. UNRWA emergency teams are continuing to assess the needs of the displaced.

- Attack on UNRWA convoy in Nahr El Bared

At around 1430hrs on 23 May, an UNRWA convoy was given clearance to enter Nahr El Bared camp to distribute relief supplies to approximately 5,500 Palestine refugee families who had been trapped inside the camp since fighting began on 20 May. The convoy comprised six vehicles, a car trucks and a water tanker. It carried 5,000 bundles of bread, six MT of milk powder, 6,000l of water, water bladders, an electricity generator and medical supplies. At 1615hrs, after the Agency had already off-loaded medicines and baby milk, the convoy and crowds of beneficiaries surrounding the vehicles came under sniper fire. The water tanker and three other Agency vehicles were hit; some sustained serious damage. Four vehicles were abandoned inside the camp. UNRWA relief staff were able to re-enter the camp to distribute bread, and members of the convoy were all eventually evacuated safely. The Agency has not yet been able to retrieve the damaged vehicles.

The humanitarian situation inside Nahr El Bared camp is a major cause for concern. Those camp residents that remain have been without running water or electricity since shortly after fighting began in the early hours of Sunday 20 May. Many water tanks on the roofs of refugee shelters have been damaged in the cross-fire, whilst water plants serving the camp have also sustained damage. Refugees fleeing the camp are being treated for dehydration, diarrhoea and stomach upsets, leading to worries of a potential

public health emergency and disease outbreak inside the camp, unless access to water is secured and waste can be removed as a matter of urgency.

A water purification unit and water supplies, which UNRWA has secured from UNICEF, are on their way to the camp and the Agency hopes to install them in a secure location later today. Options for distribution of water to camp residents are currently being explored.

Security conditions inside the camp have so far prevented UNRWA relief staff and water engineers from conducting an in-depth assessment of humanitarian conditions.

Emergency teams, with technical assistance from local and international partners, have been established and deployed to the area and will enter the camp when conditions allow.

Accurate information on the number of casualties is also unavailable. Medical convoys have been able to evacuate some wounded and provide emergency medical supplies, in coordination with the ICRC. One UNRWA staff member, Mr. Adel Khalil, a teacher at Al Manara School in the camp, has been killed in the fighting between the Lebanese Army and Fatah Al Islam. He was married with seven children.