

15 August 2006

## The Situation of Palestine Refugees in South Lebanon

### *Background*

The Palestine Refugees in South Lebanon live in the city of Tyre, villages around the city and towards the Israeli border and in three camps: El-Buss (1.5km south-east of the city of Tyre), Burj el-Shemali (3km east of Tyre) and Rashidieh (on the seashore 5km south of Tyre).

### *Population Movements*

With the outbreak of the conflict on 12-13 July the Palestine refugee camps saw both in-flows and outflows of displaced people. A survey conducted two weeks after the outbreak of hostilities estimated the population of the three camps at 25,363, with 2,920 having left the camps, and 22,443 left behind. While UNRWA has no precise data on the whereabouts of those who left, the community reports that most have gone to friends and family in the Palestinian camps in Saida. Palestinian IDPs from the Tyre area are believed to be among the 5,376 IDPs who have arrived in the Saida camps since the start of the conflict.

A small minority with the funds for rent were believed to have moved to the mountains and others to the Beirut and north Lebanon areas. UNRWA is asking all Palestinian IDPs in the country to notify its local staff of their whereabouts.

In addition to those leaving the camps, 4,923 people moved into the camps from the surrounding area in the belief that they were safer locations. Of these 2,805 were non-camp Palestine refugees and 2,118 are Lebanese. The majority are staying with friends and relatives, but 832 (762 Lebanese, 70 Palestinian) were being hosted in UNRWA schools.

On the morning of 14 August a number of the displaced families living in UNRWA schools left to return to their homes or began preparing to leave. By August 15 all the Lebanese and Palestinian IDPs in UNRWA schools in the Tyre area had left to return to their homes.

### *Conditions*

The Tyre area was the target of sustained Israeli bombardment from the beginning of the conflict but the camps themselves were not directly targeted. However, the bombing and shelling on many occasions was in the immediate vicinity of the camps and for several hours at a time. There is anecdotal evidence of stress disorders manifesting themselves within families because of the sustained bombing, an assessment of psychosocial needs is planned.

Of real concern to UNRWA is the condition of the approximately 50 per cent of refugees, possibly as many as 25,000 people, who live outside of the camps in the south, particularly those who live in villages near the Israeli border. While the camp residents have largely escaped the Israeli bombardment, those outside the camp have suffered in the same way as the Lebanese population. An urgent assessment of their needs will be made now that hostilities have ceased.

Burj El Shamali camp was without electricity from the second day of hostilities. UNRWA's environmental health staff have been using generators to supply power to water pumps in the camps to allow refugees to be supplied with water for three to four hours each day. Otherwise there has been no electric power in the camp. As at 13 August the camp had enough fuel to allow it to continue pumping water for one week. All commercial fuel stations in Tyre are closed.

Rashidieh and El-Buss both had intermittent electric power until 11 August, but are now cut off. UNRWA is pumping water for three to four hours a day to refugee shelters. At 13 August Rashidieh had enough fuel for its water pumps to last 20 days, while El-Buss had enough for one week.

UNRWA is attempting to get 5,000 litres to the south in an early convoy to re-supply the camps in the aftermath of the ceasefire's commencement, but rationing will stay in place until it arrives. Urgent efforts are being made post-ceasefire to repair the damaged electricity network in the area. It is reported that power stations themselves were not targeted by the Israelis, rather it is the network that is damaged and this should be repairable within days.

The minority in the camps with labouring jobs in the agriculture and construction industries were not able to work or earn from the beginning of the conflict. Lebanon has double the number of refugees classified by UNRWA as Special Hardship Cases (11.4 per cent), but even this does not reflect the very high number who live in chronic poverty. The large number of refugee families reliant on remittances from overseas were faced with closed banks. The refugee population is ill-equipped to survive these economic shocks. With no access to Lebanese social support the population is extremely dependent on the relief supplied by UNRWA and the community's own close social ties to be able to cope.

Public health conditions in the camps were largely maintained by UNRWA's sanitation labourers. It was not possible to take garbage to the normal municipal dump sites because of the conflict, but UNRWA's staff in each camp collected waste and temporarily stored it just outside each camp. Sanitary staff were also providing services to those displaced in UNRWA's schools.

Following the Israeli warning of 8 August that it would strike any moving vehicle south of the Litani river, the Palestine refugees remained almost completely sequestered inside the refugee camps and their shelters.

### *UNRWA Relief Assistance and Regular Programmes*

UNRWA's largest relief operations from the start of the conflict were aimed at the Tyre area. In total, 28,894 people received some kind of aid from the Agency.

The largest component was a general food distribution for 21,243 people – for the general refugee population not in the Agency's special hardship category and for 2,118 Lebanese displaced and 2,805 displaced Palestinians from outside the camps. These distributions were made on the 3-8 August. An additional 7,651 refugees in the Special Hardship Cases (SHC) category also received rations. In total UNRWA has distributed 194.5 metric tons of food aid to the Tyre area.

The food aid was provided in slightly different quantities for the general and SHC populations, but both contained sugar, rice, several varieties of pulses, whole milk and cooking oil.

In addition to the food aid, medical supplies were sent to UNRWA health centres after 12 July to ensure that each one was stocked with enough to cope for between 2.5-3.5 months. Additional vaccines were also sent to supply the medical centres with enough to last one month.

To assist the displaced living in UNRWA schools the Agency supplied kitchen and hygiene kits, water and household items like bedding to 853 people in Tyre.