The Beirut Explosions
5 August 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

- On 4 August, two explosions hit the city of Beirut, reportedly caused by 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate being stored in a warehouse in the port of the city.

- As of 5 August, the Lebanese Red Cross reports that more than 100 people have been killed and more than 4,000 have been injured. A further 100 are reportedly still missing. The number of children affected is still to be confirmed.

- Significant damage has been reported to buildings and infrastructure particularly in the areas surrounding the port as well as further afield. According to the city’s Governor up to 300,000 people have lost their houses and are now displaced, many of which are children, with an estimated cost of the damage being above US $3 billion.

- Hospitals are overwhelmed and three main hospitals in Beirut are severely damaged including a newborn unit near the port.

- A two-week state of emergency and a three-day mourning period has been declared.

- UNICEF staff have also been impacted by the explosions and we grieve with one of our colleagues who has lost his spouse. Our thoughts are also with eight of our staff members and three of their dependants who have been injured, of which two staff remain in critical condition.

- All 213 staff members from Lebanon CO and their 318 dependants and additional UNICEF personal currently in Lebanon have been accounted for.

- UNICEF is responding to the immediate needs and is working to support the Government and partners with its requests.
SITUATION OVERVIEW

At 18:00 (GMT+3) on 4 August, two explosions took place in Beirut city. An initial explosion was recorded in the port of the city, with a second huge enormous explosion occurring moments later. The second explosion is believed to have taken place in a warehouse used to store 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate. The explosion sent shockwaves throughout the city causing multiple casualties and widespread damage even beyond the city.

Officials expect the death toll and casualties to rise further as emergency rescue operations are ongoing. As of the morning of 5 August, the Lebanese Red Cross reports that more than 100 people have been killed and more than 4,000 have been injured. Significant damage has been reported to buildings and civilian infrastructure particularly in the areas surrounding the port until as far as 20 km from the port. According to the city’s Governor up to 300,000 people have lost their houses and have been displaced, many of which are children. Schools, currently on summer break, have been opened as shelters. The port is also reportedly severely damaged, with parts completely destroyed including strategic grain silos, reducing the reserve to less than a month, along with critical medical supplies. The airport is still functioning despite suffering some damage and commercial flights continue. Many facilities have been damaged including three main hospitals in Beirut which are severely damaged with others being relocated. Already overwhelmed by the COVID-19 situation, the hospital situation has become critical with hospitals in Beirut reaching full capacity and reporting a lack of equipment to treat the injured and care for patients in critical condition. Some injured are transferred to hospitals in other parts of the country. Urgent calls have been made for blood donations across the country. Relocation of hospitals, COVID-19 units, health supplies and stock are currently underway.

Lebanon has already been suffering from political instability, economic collapse and a surge in COVID-19 cases. The pandemic meant that hospitals are overwhelmed, and front-line workers are exhausted. This explosion with the vast number of affected people overwhelmed the already stretched health services of the country.

Lebanon has a population of 6 million, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 180,000 Palestine refugees. Lebanon remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crises and continues to host the highest number of displaced per capita in the world. Since October 2019, Lebanon has faced an unprecedented economic and socio-political challenge while already suffering from the economic impact of the longstanding Syria conflict. The outbreak of COVID-19 and yesterday’s explosion will further contribute to the economic recession, compounding existing poor governance and increasing vulnerabilities of all residents in Lebanon.

RESPONSE

Immediately after the explosions, UNICEF alongside with the national authorities and civil society, has been supporting the affected population with life-saving activities.

We have provided drinking water to port workers and first line responders at the Beirut port. UNICEF and partners supported the Ministry of Public Health to take out what is left of stored medicines and vaccines in the damaged warehouse at the port to make sure those vital supplies are safe and available for children across the country. UNICEF is also currently conducting cold chain assessment of all cold rooms in the central warehouse to identify the possibility of rehabilitation. Nineteen newborns who were inpatients at the damaged newborn unit supported by UNICEF have been transported to a hospital with intensive care unit capacities; unfortunately, one newborn did not survive.
UNICEF Lebanon country office is in touch with Government counterparts and partners to scale up its support to affected children and their families in order to respond to the immediate and medium-term needs as they emerge. Preliminary assessments are being undertaken on warehouses, schools, health facilities including hospitals. There are early indications that ten containers of vital personal protective equipment (PPE) have been destroyed. These items that are critical to Lebanon’s COVID-19 response will need to be urgently replaced. Some 12 Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) have also been severely damaged whilst others are partially damaged and will need support. UNICEF with the Ministry of Education are assessing the damage to schools; initial reports are that some 34 schools are damaged from the blast.

In view of the initial assessment, a priority for UNICEF will be to ensure that children are safe. To ensure they are coping with bereavement and trauma of the events they witnessed, we will provide psychosocial support services. We also aim to support the reunification of children who have been separated from their family. It is paramount that we ensure the continuity of health services and immunisation and the provision of essential WASH services particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF anticipates supporting the rehabilitation of damaged schools for when children return to school. To be able to respond to these needs, UNICEF estimates that it will require US$4.4 million.

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