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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

WFP News Release

The Lebanon Crisis WFP Operational update 4 August 2006 WFP FACES MAJOR SETBACKS & DEVELOPMENTS IN ITS ABILITY TO DELIVER URGENT AID TO LEBANON

Overnight bombing of the highway north from Beirut to the Syrian border has cut the road in at least three places and reportedly destroyed critical bridges. This could effectively sever the vital humanitarian lifeline between Lebanon and the outside world. WFP is extremely concerned about destruction along what has been the main supply route as it will greatly hamper its ability to deliver essential goods and emergency personnel from the north and across the border in Syria, from its humanitarian hub in Arida.

Time is of the essence and every delay is a setback to urgent humanitarian work. Convoys planned today of relief supplies and incoming emergency personnel from Syria to Lebanon have had to be cancelled. WFP planned this morning to dispatch a team to make a rapid survey of the damage along the corridor, and to advise on repairs and alternative routes. However, the team was unable to proceed due to lack of concurrence. There was initial concurrence to our proposal, but it was subsequently declined. WFP is exploring possible alternative interior routes.

The severing of the road makes the start of WFP flights today directly into Beirut airport even more important (while keeping in mind that the quantities of aid which can be delivered by air are relatively small compared with overland and sea). This morning, 10 tons of WFP high energy biscuits and 2 tons of other essential supplies departed from the UN Humanitarian Depot in Brindisi, Italy aboard a C-130 Hercules aircraft, made possible by the generous offer from the Government of Portugal. The aircraft is expected to conduct four rotations between Friday and Monday, delivering a total of 42 metric tons of WFP high-energy biscuits, four tons of medical supplies for the World Health Organisation as well as other urgently-needed relief supplies.

Concurrence on safety for this flight into Beirut has been received from both parties to the conflict. WFP is coordinating the massive logistics operation on behalf of the UN and international relief community.

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"We are extremely grateful for this generous and well-timed humanitarian gesture on the part of the Government and Portuguese people," said Ramiro Lopes da Silva, WFP's Director of Logistics based in Rome. "This is a critical period in our operation when people need assistance more acutely than ever. Flying supplies in means the people who need them most will be helped as quickly as possible."

The overnight bombardment, this time in the suburbs of south Beirut, also meant WFP has had to postpone convoy planned for today to Tyre and Rashidiyeh. A number of our truck drivers, as well as our escort vehicle drivers, were unable to leave their apartments in south Beirut because of the bombing, and thus the convoy could not depart.

However, the third WFP convoy planned for today, carrying supplies from UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP (WFP wheat flour, canned meat and vegetable oil, as well as water, medical supplies and sanitation kits on behalf of UNICEF, UNHCR and UNDP) did manage to proceed today without problem from Beirut to Jezzine. Also on Friday, WFP Goodwill Ambassador Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein is visiting Lebanese refugees across the border in Syria along with WFP Executive Director James Morris. WFP is distributing food aid to at least 7,000 Lebanese refugees in Syria (see separate press release on www.wfp.org) To date, WFP has completed nine humanitarian convoys (10 including today's to Jezzine) to south Lebanon from Beirut, supplying the following locations: Tyre, Jezzine, Sidon, Qana and Tebnin.

WFP convoys have delivered a total of 280 tons of food, sufficient for 80,000 people for one week. In addition to its own food, WFP convoys carry food and other relief items on behalf of WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNRWA and several NGOs. These have been severely hampered by security and logistical problems, including damaged roads, forcing long detours over difficult terrain, as well as causing mechanical breakdowns. Food supplies delivered to southern Lebanon are enough to feed 80,000 people for a week. However, tens of thousands of people remain trapped in the region without any outside assistance, while fighting continues around them. They are in urgent need of food, clean water, medical supplies, fuel and shelter.

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Note to editors: WFP is appealing for urgent funds for its Lebanon operation and would appreciate specific mention of our Donate Online page at www.wfp.org/donate

Video and photo images are available. Please contact Jonathan Dumont at jonathan.dumont@wfp.org for video images and Rein Skullerud at rein.skullerud@wfp.org for photos.

WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency: each year, we give food to an average of 90 million poor people to meet their nutritional needs, including 58 million hungry children, in at least 80 of the world's poorest countries. WFP -- We Feed People. Visit our website: www.wfp.org

WFP now has a dedicated ISDN line in Italy for quality two-way interviews with WFP officials.

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