

Stockholm, Friday 21 July 2006

UNHCR says safe corridors crucial to deliver relief aid in Lebanon

STOCKHOLM – The UN refugee agency is ready to release tonnes of emergency supplies to the displaced people in Lebanon from its emergency stockpiles in Jordan and Syria, but that aid cannot reach those in need of it before safe corridors for humanitarian aid are established.

“We have no guarantees yet of safe passage to the mountain regions where thousands of displaced people have sought refuge,” Paal Aarsaether, spokesperson for UNHCR in the Nordic and Baltic countries, said. “As soon as safe land transport routes are established, we are ready to deliver aid supplies from our warehouses in the region,” he added.

The UN refugee agency has considerable emergency stocks already positioned in the Middle East. In Jordan and Syria alone, UNHCR has 250,000 blankets, some 50,000 mattresses, 30,000 kitchen sets, 22,000 tents, 17,000 stoves and other relief items. Additional quantities are available in Kuwait and Iraq, and more aid would be flown in from UNHCR’s worldwide network of emergency stockpiles if necessary.

“Currently UNHCR teams are carrying out preliminary assessments of the needs of tens of thousands of displaced people who have sought refuge in mountain valleys outside Beirut and elsewhere in the country,” Mr Aarsaether said. UNHCR is now present in the mountain regions of the Aleye Valley and Kesrouan region, as well as in Sidon in the south. Just in the Aleye Valley alone, the UN refugee agency has located over 80,000 displaced people, with more arriving every hour.

UNHCR remains concerned about the safety and well-being of some 20,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly Iraqis, in Lebanon. Those who have been approaching UNHCR’s Beirut office for assistance have been given the necessary aid.

The UN refugee agency is continuing to monitor the Lebanese border, and so far, more than 100,000 people have crossed into Syria. Most are Syrian nationals who have been working in Lebanon, but there are also Lebanese with family links in Syria who are not requiring assistance. Until now, just over 700 Lebanese families have needed help and are being assisted by the Syrian Red Crescent.

UNHCR is working very closely with other UN agencies and the Lebanese government’s High Relief Committee. The initial costs of UNHCR’s emergency

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operation are expected to be more than 18 million US dollars. A joint UN Flash Appeal is expected to be launched next week to raise funds for the aid effort.

Private individuals, organizations and firms in the Nordic and Baltic countries who would like to support UNHCR's relief work in Lebanon and surrounding countries can do so by donating money to the following bank accounts and marking their contribution "UNHCR Lebanon Crisis".

Denmark: 2040-0001 443 194

Finland: 800013-223667

Norway: 6005.07.33125

Sweden: 452-1431

One can also donate online on: www.unhcr.org/donate

For more information, please contact spokesperson Paal Aarsaether, UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries in Stockholm, on tel. +46 8 457 48 86 or e-mail aarsaeth@unhcr.org.

After office hours and on weekends, UNHCR's PI officer on duty in the Nordic and Baltic countries can be reached on mobile +46 70 899 0169.

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