



Stockholm, Saturday 29 July 2006

UNHCR convoy carries 400 tonnes of aid to Lebanon

STOCKHOLM – The UN refugee agency's first convoy of emergency supplies to Lebanon - carrying 400 tonnes of relief aid – is scheduled to arrive Saturday afternoon in the conflict-thorn country, where thousands of displaced people are in desperate need of help.

"This is good news. It's the initial batch of supplies we have ready to dispatch to Lebanon from Syria immediately, but it's a good start and now we can quickly bring more supplies from our stockpiles in Amman to rush into Lebanon," said Ekber Menemencioglu, UNHCR's director for the region. "People are desperate and need our help."

The first convoy left the Syrian capital on Saturday morning and further convoys will follow on Sunday and Monday. In Damascus Friday afternoon, 3,500 blankets, 3,600 mattresses, 2,820 collapsible jerry cans and 54 kitchen sets were loaded onto three semi-trailers and a truck for the journey to Lebanon.

On Saturday at the border crossing to Lebanon, the supplies will be loaded onto seven trucks from UNHCR's sister agency the World Food Programme - responsible for UN aid logistics inside Lebanon - for the journey to Beirut.

These first supplies will be distributed to help thousands of displaced people living in communal shelters - such as schools and even parks - who have fled into mountain regions and around Beirut to escape the conflict. More supplies will be following.

"People have survived up until now on their reserves. But, we've reached a turning point where things could deteriorate very quickly unless we can get them practical help soon," said UNHCR's Arafat Jamal in Beirut.

An estimated 700,000-800,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon since the conflict flared in mid-July and living conditions for many of them are extremely tough.

UNHCR has substantial stockpiles of emergency relief supplies in Jordan and Syria to release for the Lebanon crisis as soon as a supply pipeline is set up.

The agency is exploring sea, land and air routes to pump more supplies into Lebanon. A logistics base is being set up in Larnaca, Cyprus and the port of Mersin in Turkey is being considered as a supply point.

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The UN refugee agency is welcoming donations to support its work in Lebanon and the surrounding countries. Donations should be marked: “UNHCR Lebanon Crisis”. In the Nordic and Baltic countries one can donate money the following ways.

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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