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Israel Escalates Offensives on Lebanon



UNICEF delivered 25 tons of emergency medical supplies to the Ministry of Public Health at the Beirut international airport in response to the escalation of conflict in Lebanon. Credit: UNICEF/UNI657198/Fouad Choufany

Oct 24 2024 (IPS) - Attacks on Lebanon over the past two months, as instigated by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have been increasingly indiscriminate. The Disaster Risk Management Unit at the Lebanese Council of Ministers confirmed that the death toll of Lebanese civilians has risen to over 2,530. Furthermore, Israel's hostilities have led to casualties among United Nations (UN) personnel, which has been described as "violations of international law".

Most recently, on the morning of October 23, the IDF coordinated an airstrike on the Lebanese port city of Tyre, mere hours after a series of airstrikes hit the suburbs of southern Beirut, decimating infrastructure. On October 22, Lebanese Cabinet member Nasser Yassin reported that Lebanon will need approximately 250 million dollars on a monthly basis to help the over 1 million displaced people due to the recent escalation in hostilities between Israel and Lebanon.

"Overnight we've seen more than 1 million people being displaced by the attacks, hostilities, by the aggression. And this is similar to an earthquake. You don't see this number in scale and the speed of it, except in major natural disasters. And this is what happened in 48 hours," said Yassin.

On October 21, an airstrike in southern Beirut destroyed several buildings within range of the Rafik Hariri University Hospital, the largest in Lebanon, and killed 18 civilians. Fears of future attacks on hospitals have spread among Lebanese civilians and officials. Daniel Hagari, spokesperson for the IDF, reported that the hospital contained a bunker with millions of dollars' worth of cash and gold.

“One of our main targets last night was an underground vault with tens of millions of dollars in cash and gold. The money was being used to finance Hezbollah’s attacks on Israel. According to the estimates we have, there is at least half a billion dollars in dollar bills and gold stored in this bunker. This money could and still can be used to rebuild the state of Lebanon,” said Hagari.

Hospital director Mazen Alame told reporters that no such bunker exists. Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has warned that any and all attacks involving hospitals are subject to thorough investigations.

On Tuesday October 22, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) detected over 1,417 projectiles that were fired south of the Blue Line, striking critical infrastructure in Al Matmurah, Al Qawzah, Aytaroun, Ett Taibe, Majdal Silim, Ghobeiry, and Khiam. The uptick in violence has led to Hezbollah taking a firmer stance, informing reporters that the conflict has reached a “new phase of escalation”. Political analysts such as Amal Saad predict that hostilities between the two parties will continue to rise in intensity.

“When you look at the bigger picture and you see in relative terms how Hezbollah has survived all this and been able to conduct such fierce resistance to an ongoing attempted invasion by the most powerful army in the Middle East, one can only conclude that Hezbollah is actually stronger than what we assumed it was. This might be a more ferocious Hezbollah that we’re seeing,” said Saad.

Reports from UNIFIL personnel indicate that peacekeeping missions along the border of Lebanon have grown increasingly difficult amid the escalation of airstrikes and ground incursions. On October 13, UNIFIL reported that the IDF breached one of their bases, firing several rounds 100 meters away from their position. 15 peacekeepers suffered injuries from smoke exposure.

UNIFIL issued a press statement on October 20, reporting that an IDF bulldozer had “deliberately demolished” a UN watchtower and perimeter fence. They reiterated that encroaching on UN positions and destroying UN assets constitute violations of international humanitarian law. Despite numerous security breaches and attacks on peacekeeping entities, UNIFIL maintains its positions in Lebanon, continuing to closely monitor and report Israeli offensives.

The UN and its affiliated organizations continue to provide support to affected communities in Lebanon. The World Food Programme (WFP) has been on the frontlines since “day one of the crisis”, distributing daily hot meals and food parcels to over 200,000 kitchens in Lebanon, and providing food assistance to nearly 150,000 Lebanese civilians who have fled to Syria.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has delivered over 140 tons of medical supplies to medical facilities and first responders. UNICEF has also provided medical and psychosocial support to people across 50 shelters in Lebanon. They have also distributed essential supplies to displacement shelters, including hygiene kits, water sanitation supplies, bedding, supplements, baby food, and maternity kits.

UNICEF has also partnered with Lebanon’s Ministry of Education to provide educational resources for children to ensure that they maintain some form of schooling in the duration of this conflict.

In the beginning of October, the UN launched a flash appeal of 426 million dollars to provide assistance to impacted communities for the next three months. Continued funding and donor contributions will be crucial as attacks remain frequent.

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