UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Lebanon blast corruption -UNDP

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Shotlist

1. Exterior wide shot, Palais des Nations flag alley, nations’ flags flying, a beautiful day.
2. SOUNDbite (English) — Arkan El Seblani, Chief Technical Advisor, Anti-Corruption & Integrity, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States: “The Beirut Port explosion is not only a humanitarian crisis, but it’s also a symptom of a much deeper and more complex governance crisis that requires dialogue and collective action. And that this crisis will not be resolved without adequate attention and direct attention to the promotion of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption”.
4. SOUNDbite (English) — Arkan El Seblani, Chief Technical Advisor, Anti-Corruption & Integrity, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States: “The cost of corruption in Lebanon is equal to 5 billion dollar a year. So, putting that number in perspective, it is about 9 percent of the country’s GDP”.
6. SOUNDbite (English) — Arkan El Seblani, Chief Technical Advisor, Anti-Corruption & Integrity, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States: “The combination of several major governance gaps are behind the improper presence of the highly explosive materials at the warehouse of the port. Who exactly is to blame for what happened? Unfortunately, we may never know. And this, on its own, is another example of the deep accountability deficit that I referred to earlier”.
7. Close-up, journalist typing on phone, Press Room III, Palais des Nations.
8. SOUNDbite (English) — Arkan El Seblani, Chief Technical Advisor, Anti-Corruption & Integrity, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States: “So leakage and embezzlement of money and
goods, bribes and kickbacks in reconstruction projects, as well as political co-optation of related
efforts are all real and present in the context of Lebanon”.
10. **Soundbite (English)** – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of
    Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “OCHA has begun the disbursement of US$8.5 million from the
    Lebanon Humanitarian Fund to provide rapid support to families that were affected by the
    disaster”.
11. **Soundbite (English)** – Marixie Mercado, Spokesperson for UNICEF: “In a rapid needs
    assessment conducted by UNICEF and partners earlier this week, half of respondents reported
    that children in their households were showing changes in behavior or signs of trauma or
    extreme stress following the explosions. These behaviours and symptoms include severe anxiety;
    quietness or withdrawing from parents and family, nightmares and trouble sleeping; and
    aggressive behaviour”.
Beirut blast exposed widespread corruption and accountability deficit in Lebanon, says UNDP

The explosion at the port of Beirut on the 4th of August has resulted in deep human suffering and massive destruction to the Lebanese capital, but it has also revealed a deeper and more devastating problem the country, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): widespread and systemic corruption.

“The Beirut Port explosion is not only a humanitarian crisis, but it’s also a symptom of a much deeper and more complex governance crisis that requires dialogue and collective action. And that this crisis will not be resolved without adequate attention and direct attention to the promotion of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption”, Arkan El Seblani, chief of UNDP’s Anti-Corruption & Integrity unit for Arab States, said today (Friday) at a news briefing in Geneva.

“The cost of corruption in Lebanon is equal to 5 billion dollar a year. So, putting that number in perspective, it is about 9 percent of the country’s GDP,” El Seblani said. These findings are based in a special report on anti-corruption in Lebanon published one day ago by the magazine “Executive,” published in partnership with UNDP experts.

The 2019 Corruption Perception Index ranked Lebanon 137th out of 180 countries.

“The combination of several major governance gaps are behind the improper presence of the highly explosive materials at the warehouse of the port. Who exactly is to blame for what happened? Unfortunately, we may never know,” El Seblani said. “And this, on its own, is another example of the deep accountability deficit that I referred to earlier”.

According to El-Sablani, this deficit is also likely to have an impact on response and recovery efforts, including related international assistance. “So, leakage and embezzlement of money and goods, bribes and kickbacks in reconstruction projects, as well as political co-optation of related efforts are all real and present in the context of Lebanon”, he said.

Despite these obstacles to bringing aid to the country, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that more than 180,000 people are being reached with critical, life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Some of this aid is delivered by funding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can reach people in need with health supplies, food assistance, and protection projects. “OCHA has begun the disbursement of US$8.5 million from the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund to provide rapid support to families that were affected by the disaster,” spokesperson Jens Laerke.

The Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF), for example, supports support five international and three local NGOs already working in Lebanon to deliver on eight projects. These include assistance to damaged primary health care centers, so that they can continue to provide essential health care, mental health support and manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with the provision of hot meals.

In an update on their ongoing assessments and response work in Beirut, UNICEF reported that the needs are “immense”, as many children will require urgent and sustained psychosocial support to address the trauma of the explosions.
“Half of respondents reported that children in their households were showing changes in behavior or signs of trauma or extreme stress following the explosions”, UNICEF spokesperson Marixie Mercado said. UNICEF’s needs assessment in the aftermath of the Beirut blast concluded that “these behaviours and symptoms include severe anxiety, quietness or withdrawing from parents and family, nightmares and trouble sleeping, and aggressive behaviour”, highlighting the urgent need for psychosocial support services.