



EUROPEAN UNION

Joint press release

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The crisis in Lebanon: EU Council will meet to assess the situation

The EU Council will hold an extraordinary meeting on 1 August in order to assess the situation in Lebanon and to prepare further EU action following the International Conference on Lebanon in Rome on 26 July.

President of the Council Erkki Tuomioja and Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner will report on their visit to the region after the Rome meeting. The High Representative for the EU's common foreign and security policy, Javier Solana, will give his assessment following extensive talks in the region and contacts with the EU's main partners.

The Rome meeting agreed to offer Lebanon a major humanitarian package, with both immediate relief and financial support. It addressed the conditions for a ceasefire process and agreed on the scope for deploying an international force in Southern Lebanon. The EU expressed its readiness to play a substantive role in contributing to such a force.

Conference participants expressed their determination to work immediately to reach with the utmost urgency a ceasefire that put an end to the current violence and hostilities. The conference affirmed that the fundamental condition for lasting security in Lebanon is the Government's full ability to exercise its authority over all its territory. It also considered that an International Force in Lebanon should urgently be authorised under a UN mandate to support the Lebanese Armed Forces in providing a secure environment.

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UPDATE ON THE EU'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

Evacuation of EU citizens from Lebanon

Latest indications are that for the most part, those EU citizens who wished to leave Lebanon have now been evacuated. Roughly 20 000 have now left, mainly via Cyprus. Most Member States have confirmed that they have completed the evacuation of their citizens.

However, there are still a few hundred people trapped in pockets in Southern Lebanon, mainly in Blida, Al Mansouri and Ramais. Efforts are continuing to establish a safe land corridor in order to evacuate them.

Evacuation of Lebanese and third country nationals from Lebanon

The conflict has left a large and potentially vulnerable group of migrant workers and their dependents from developing countries - thought to number between 100,000 and 200,000 - who are at risk of being stranded. Their governments do not, in general, have the means to support their evacuation and repatriation and have appealed for international assistance; requests have been made by Sri Lanka, Philippines, Bangladesh, Ghana, Ethiopia, Sudan, Iraq, Moldova and Nepal.

The Commission has significantly reinforced its presence in Beirut to ensure optimal coordination with the Member States, the Lebanese authorities, the United Nations and other humanitarian partners. Following activation of the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism, the Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) has established an EU civil protection coordination and assessment team in Lebanon.

On 26 July, the Commission allocated EUR 11 million under the EU's Rapid Reaction Mechanism to fund in its entirety an appeal by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to help around 10 000 citizens from developing countries return home from Lebanon. The package will assist in particular in evacuating the most vulnerable people, essentially women and children.

The main evacuation route for third country nationals is through Syria and Jordan; smaller numbers are being evacuated through Cyprus. The IOM has been called upon to provide assistance to evacuees to cover their basic needs while in transit and to ensure a swift and orderly repatriation.

There are estimated to be 150,000 Lebanese and 20,000 other nationals in Syria. According to the United Nations Development Programme, around 300,000 refugees are expected in Syria in the coming weeks, and many will not be able to leave for a second destination. In Lebanon itself, there are approximately 30,000 refugees in the Beirut area, and about 80,000 displaced people in the Aleye Valley. The number of displaced people arriving in the Shuf Mountains continues to increase.

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Onward repatriation of EU citizens and third country nationals from Cyprus

As of 25 July, a total of 41,200 evacuees had arrived in Cyprus – of whom roughly 18 000 are EU citizens – with 38,000 to 40,000 onward departures.

MIC is assisting the Cypriot authorities in removing bottlenecks to the evacuation effort. Commissioner Stavros Dimas, responsible for the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism, was in Cyprus on 25 July to discuss further EU support in coping with the evacuation flows.

The humanitarian situation in Lebanon

The high numbers of displaced people in Lebanon poses a serious challenge. The Commission took emergency decisions on 24 and 26 July on a total of EUR 20 million in support of victims in Lebanon and evacuees in neighbouring countries. For the time being, the following most urgent needs are to be addressed immediately:

- Drugs and emergency medical supplies;
- Water and food;
- Non-food items;
- Shelter (adaptation of sanitation facilities in schools and public buildings);
- Support to health, water and sanitation structures in Beirut.

ECHO is currently assessing the UN's flash appeal for USD 150 million and an expected appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross for an estimated SFR 76 to 90 million; the Commission stands ready to increase its assistance and its support to a total of EUR 50 million. It is preparing for the mobilisation of the EU's Emergency Reserve, to be agreed on by the EU's budgetary authorities.

The EU has urged the Israeli authorities to guarantee access and safe passage for humanitarian goods and workers in line with international humanitarian law, which has been a major difficulty since the start of the Israeli military action in Lebanon.

See also the following press release issued on 24 July:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/er/90662.pdf

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