

## Humanitarian response in focus: Addressing the impact of hostilities in Lebanon and the escalating regional conflict

### Expert meeting

Thursday 14 November 2024 | 15:30 - 17:00 CET | hybrid

### *Summary report*

As the violence in the Middle East persists without any sign of a ceasefire, civilians across the region - in Gaza and the West Bank, but also in Lebanon - continue to endure extreme suffering. The conflict has escalated dramatically, with significant casualties, and widespread damage. In Lebanon alone, Israeli attacks have caused more than 3,600 deaths, and more than 15,000 injured; close to one million people have been displaced across Lebanon, and nearly 600,000 people have crossed the border into Syria, according to a [UN News report](#) dated November 22, 2024. The impact of the escalation is of huge concern. Aid workers and organisations are working around the clock to support those in need, despite overwhelming challenges like the destruction of healthcare facilities and civilian infrastructure.

On November 14<sup>1</sup>, KUNO and the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) organised an expert meeting with a specific focus on Lebanon. While previous sessions in April and October concentrated on Gaza, this meeting emphasised Lebanon's growing humanitarian needs, without losing sight of the regional context. The main objectives of this session were to examine the regional geopolitical landscape and national political dynamics, to address the current humanitarian needs in Lebanon in the wake of the recent escalation of violence, and to discuss the current humanitarian efforts on the ground, led by local actors, and the newly launched DRA Acute Joint Response in Lebanon. Participants were international and local staff from humanitarian and human rights organisations, and academics working in conflict or humanitarian studies.

### Speakers<sup>2</sup>

- **Nora Stel**, Assistant Professor in Conflict Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen.
- **Gerard Jonkman**, Director of the Rights Forum.
- **Myrna Hammadi**, Field Coordinator of the DRA Acute Crisis Joint Response in Lebanon, War Child, & **Ioanna Charalambous**, Account Manager of the DRA, War Child, also representing the DRA Lebanon Acute Crisis Joint Response.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that on this day there weren't any signs of a ceasefire yet, which only came into effect on November 27th.

<sup>2</sup> The order of speaker was different during the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances, it has been changed back to the original order for better readability of this report.

- **Pia Zeinoun**, Research Lead at Oxfam Novib, Co-Founder and Vice President of the Embrace Mental Health Centre in Lebanon.

This meeting took place under the Chatham House Rules. Following the remarks of the speakers, participants were invited to reflect, ask questions and engage in a discussion jointly. The discussion was moderated by **Tessa Terpstra**, Director of Communication and Advocacy at Save the Children.

**Nora Stel** addressed the regional geopolitical landscape of the conflict. The current situation should be seen as an episode of a much longer conflict, as there have been attacks on Lebanon by Israel since the 1980s. There is a history of mistrust between the two warring factions, and multiple generations have experienced conflict, displacement and the constant fear of (re)escalation. Still, as Nora addressed, with 3000 bombs per day, Lebanon currently faces the worst bombing in the last few decades, leading to an excessive amount of civilian harm. It was emphasised that the two conflicting parties are fundamentally different and asymmetrical in terms of military tactics, and Israel is using collateral damage as a war strategy. It is expected that any service delivery, including aid, will face difficulties in the near future. According to Nora, it is also important to consider Syrian refugee returnees in this context.

**Gerard Jonkman** reflected on the impact of violence on civilians and refugee communities, as well as national political dynamics. Although the civil war formally ended in 1990, the war in a way never really ended, which complicates aid provision. The civil war continued with other means (economic, and political). Lebanese society is in a way very much fragmented along the lines of the civil war. In the current war, several villages are already completely destroyed, and civilians live in dangerous places. In the affected areas, Lebanese citizens are displaced due to the destruction of their houses, the lack of money, and many children are unable to go to school. Political and community leaders ask for support from different donors with different political agendas, which makes collaboration more difficult. Meanwhile, other areas are not damaged at all, which shows internal disparities in the country. Gerard addressed that Lebanon is destabilised as the Lebanese army is weak and Hezbollah is increasingly becoming weaker, while other parties see possibilities to grow.

Recently, the DRA Acute Crisis Joint Response (ACJR) was launched in Lebanon, which runs for six months until 16 April 2025. Coordinator **Myrna Hammadi**, calling in from Beirut, and contact lead **Ioanna Charalambous** addressed the initial efforts. The DRA ACJR is working closely together with 10 local partners and 6 DRA partners. Both speakers noted that the program follows a community-based approach, stressing the importance of complementarity and the equal status of local organisations in decision-making. With their efforts, the DRA ACJR in Lebanon aims to target approximately 60.000 beneficiaries, also including non-Lebanese citizens. Efforts entail case management activities and establishing working groups. There is also a focus on healthcare, psychosocial support, food security, protection, advocacy and MPCA, Shelter/NFI & WASH. As discussed by Myrna, the DRA ACJR advocates for its staff in Lebanon - in terms of staff group therapy, healthcare, and providing shelter for the families of staff.

**Pia Zeinoun** gave more insights into the work of local organisations on the ground in Lebanon. As Co-Founder and Vice President of Embrace in Lebanon, she discussed its short-term and long-term efforts. She talked about the construction of a community mental health centre that offers free psychiatry, social work and therapy sessions and the launch of a mobile clinic to serve rural areas. Embrace also reached out to local emergency responders (e.g., hospitals, police, firefighters) to develop a national mechanism to respond to mental health emergencies. She concluded by emphasising the importance of mental health support in conflict settings, as mental health is a human right. War produces trauma and several generations in Lebanon have been exposed to violence. Furthermore, Pia noted that intergenerational trauma as a result of conflict is one of the root causes of many systemic problems in the country.

Subsequently, a representative from the [Tiro Association for Arts \(TAA\)](#), a Lebanese cultural organisation, joined the panel and described their current relief efforts in three Lebanese cities, and how their activities are being complicated by lacking electricity. By opening up their cinemas, TAA is currently offering shelter and artistic relief for Lebanese civilians.

### **Discussion**

After the introductions, the room was opened for dialogue and questions. One participant underlined the vulnerable position of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as 10.000 are being detained from Lebanon notwithstanding they are unable to pay the fee to return.

The role of the United Nations (UN) in conflict resolution was discussed. One of the participants saw possibilities for the UN to support the Lebanese army in the South, whereas another participant questioned whether the UN could make a difference despite being present. It was then pointed out that most actors would refer to the [UN Security Council Resolution 1701](#) as a starting point for ceasefire negotiations<sup>3</sup>. This Resolution was adopted in 2006 to resolve the war at that time. Still, the purpose of this resolution is to end violence between Hezbollah and Israel, as the UN Security Council calls for a permanent ceasefire based on the construction of buffer zones. To achieve a ceasefire, Nora stressed the need to adapt the UN Security Resolution 1701 by adding more conditions.

A question was also raised about the impact of recent elections around the world, and how, for instance, the newly elected Trump administration will affect ceasefire possibilities. It was stressed that without holding Israel accountable for disrespecting international law and institutions, a ceasefire cannot be credible. The United States can play a role in holding Israel accountable. A united role for the European Union (EU) in the resolution of the conflict was questioned due to the fragmentation of EU member states. This is shown, for example, by the differences between the positions of Hungary and France towards the conflict in Lebanon.

The expert meeting underscored the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian efforts, the need for a ceasefire, and more united engagement of the international community to help achieve this. Strengthening local partnerships and addressing mental health and protection challenges remain priorities for the humanitarian community.

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<sup>3</sup> As said before, at the time of this meeting, there were no signs of a ceasefire yet.