

Monday 7 October 2024

Lebanon struggles to cope as over a million people flee Israel's military invasion - Oxfam

The Lebanese authorities, communities and humanitarian agencies are struggling to shelter and provide the necessities of life to over one million people fleeing Israel's airstrikes and invasion to the south, Oxfam said today.

Oxfam is working with local partners in Lebanon and alongside other aid agencies as part of the government's humanitarian response plan following Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon and aerial bombardment.

Oxfam assessments in shelters across Lebanon have found people most need mattresses, bedding, and cooking and sanitation items. Women also need sanitary pads, towels, and underwear. Oxfam and partners have started distributing some of this aid as well as water.

Gheith Bittar, Executive Director for Oxfam partner SHIFT - Social Innovation Hub, said more displaced people are arriving by the day and he fears shelters may buckle under the strain.

"The shelters are not ready to host the number of IDPs we are taking on and 629 are already full. They are public schools that are not equipped to be shelters and we are facing problems. For example, we don't have hot water for showers. We will get to a point where we won't be able to cope. Without funds, we cannot sustain our support to the shelters. The ground invasion will only increase the number of IDPs, and we have already seen an increase in the number of displaced people on a daily basis with the continuous bombardment. The situation will only get worse as winter approaches.

"People are coming to us traumatised. Most of them have lost their houses and relatives. Some of them were scared because of the scale of bombardment as they were fleeing, and many others because of their fear of the unknown coming to a new city. People are suffering, they have many, many, issues to think about."

Oxfam says without a ceasefire the greenlight by Israel to a ground invasion in southern Lebanon will likely lead to a further escalation of the conflict and fighting, that will cause even more destruction of communities and inflame an already volatile region.

"The ground invasion and bombardment that includes Beirut and the southern suburbs will create a serious challenge for the humanitarian system in a few short days. People are being forced to flee with little to no notice, and often having to leave everything behind to shelters that are inadequate or sharing crowded homes with few essential supplies. None know when they can return. Without a ceasefire the number of people desperately in need will only grow, as will their needs. The shelter system is set to collapse if there is no peace on the horizon," said Oxfam's Lebanon Country Director, Bachir Ayoub.

Oxfam is appealing for donations globally. "The needs of people in Lebanon who've been injured, traumatised and displaced, in fear of what the future might hold for them, are already huge. No other solution other than a ceasefire can alleviate the crisis they are facing," Ayoub said.

There must be an end to this violence. All parties must stop fighting. We need safe space to get people the aid they need," he said.

For interviews with spokespeople, please contact Lucy Brown at lucyb@oxfam.org.au or 0478 190 099.