

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program Title: *HUMANITARIAN AID FOR EXTREMELY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS*

Geographic Information: *Lebanon: South Beirut, Bekka Valley and South Lebanon*

Start & End Dates: *July 2006 – October 2006*

Requested Support: *\$500,000*

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Photo: REUTERS/NIKOLA SOLIC

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Purpose: *Help meet the needs of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals such as refugees, displaced persons, children and the elderly through:*

- 1) Rapid distribution of food and other emergency supplies (such as bedding and hygiene items) to the most vulnerable populations in hard-hit areas in and around Beirut and across southern Lebanon.*
- 2) Provision of safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities in these same areas to improve the standard of living and prevent the spread of communicable diseases.*

OVERVIEW

The conflict that erupted on July 12, 2006 between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah militants has driven more than 500,000 Lebanese from their homes, seriously damaged the country's transportation infrastructure and severely restricted access to the country by sea, land and air. As a result, stocks of food, medicine and other essential items are dropping, prices continue to rise. Although the entire country is feeling these effects, the humanitarian situation is most dire in southern Lebanon, the Bekka Valley and South Beirut. These predominantly Shiia areas are considered to be Hezbollah strongholds and have been the focus of IDF strikes. Residents of these communities are struggling to meet their basic needs, especially the most vulnerable populations such as Palestinian refugees, displaced families, children, the elderly and the disabled.

Mercy Corps is responding to the crisis with distributions of food parcels, bedding and other essential items in the Chouf area to the southeast of Beirut, which is thought to have received as much as one third of all the displaced persons in the country. Mercy Corps' current operations center on the town of Aley, the largest population center in the Chouf. Aley's residents have been very welcoming to the displaced persons pouring in from hard-hit neighborhoods in south Beirut and elsewhere. There are now thought to be around 100,000 displaced persons sheltering in the area with roughly 25,000 living in schools and other public buildings. The remainder have mostly found refuge in private homes.

Mercy Corps' aid distribution in Chouf began in the small town of Keyfoun on July 21. Once a community of around 5,000 inhabitants, Keyfoun's population has swollen to more than 40,000 due to the daily influx of internally displaced people seeking a haven from the conflict. Around 20,000 have been taken in by local families while the remaining 15,000 are staying in schools and municipal buildings hastily converted by local authorities into "transit centers."

The situation in Keyfoun is not unique. Across the country, Lebanese have taken other families into their homes in huge numbers. In some cases, several families are sheltering in a single household. While the generosity of the host families is enormous, it is not enough on its own to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of displaced and vulnerable people. Over the medium term, the presence of guest families places a serious burden on the financial and other resources of their hosts. In the transit centers, the situation is still worse. These buildings were not designed to provide round-the-clock shelter to large numbers of people. There is a pressing need for bedding, fresh water and improved sanitation facilities. The situation in South Lebanon, where the attacks have concentrated, is thought to be even worse since the violence has left the local populations isolated and cut-off from outside assistance.

As is almost always the case, the effects of this crisis fall heavily on the most vulnerable members of the community. Aside from those trapped in the combat zone in South Lebanon, the list of Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVI) includes Palestinian and other foreign refugees, displaced persons with no family network to depend on, as well as children, the elderly and the disabled. Mercy Corps has designed our emergency programs to specifically target these EVIs and ensure they get the support they need.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Mercy Corps is carrying out distribution activities in Chouf while simultaneously assessing the rapidly changing conditions on a daily basis. We are coordinating closely with local and national authorities, as well as other relief agencies and the expanding United Nations presence, in order to identify the most pressing needs and adjust our operations accordingly. We currently seek additional funding for our emergency response program that will allow us to:

Expand Beirut Relief Operations. Mercy Corps plans to significantly increase the numbers of vulnerable people being served and expand our operations beyond Chouf to more hard-hit areas in and around Beirut over the coming days and weeks.

Establish Emergency Response in South Lebanon. Mercy Corps is preparing the way for relief operations in southern Lebanon and the Bekka Valley which have so far borne the brunt of the conflict. We are already in communication with partners there and plan to begin transport of emergency items to these communities as soon as conditions permit.

Although the situation is changing and is expected to continue to evolve over time, Mercy Corps has been able to identify several broad objectives that meet the most pressing local needs and fill gaps in the assistance provided by the national government, local and international aid agencies and the United Nations.

Objective One – Food and Non-Food Assistance

Food assistance will generally be provided in packages designed to last a family of ten for ten days. These packages consist mainly of canned or dried food items that are easy to transport, store and prepare. Their contents have been determined in cooperation with the Lebanese Government's Ministry of Social Affairs and High Commission for Relief. Non-food items will be supplied in accordance with needs identified by local officials and the displaced persons themselves. In both cases, distributions are designed and implemented in cooperation with local municipal leaders and volunteer committees composed of displaced people, refugees and community leaders.

Food packages will contain items such as:

- Rice, sugar, salt, lentils, chickpeas, pasta, cooking oil, powdered milk, tea etc.

Non-food items to be distributed may include:

- Mattresses, blankets, hygiene supplies, cooking utensils, candles and matches etc.

Mercy Corps will ensure that the physical and emotional needs of children are taken into account during the emergency distribution process including the provision of supplies such as:

- Diapers, powdered milk, milk bottles and other items identified in cooperation with representatives of displaced families, local educators and UNICEF.

Objective Two – Safe Drinking Water and Improved Sanitation

Mercy Corps will tailor water and sanitation activities to the specific needs in each location. The focus will be on the transit centers where the numbers of people seeking shelter far exceeds the capacity of these schools, municipal offices and other public buildings. Depending on the specific situation, our activities may include:

- Installing water tanks on transit center roofs and filling them every 24-48 hours from local supplies or by water trucked in by vendors or from springs in the surrounding area.
- Establish connections to existing water systems and making emergency repairs to those systems.
- Repair or expand existing sanitation facilities or construct temporary facilities.

The aim of the water and sanitation activities is to provide clean water for drinking, bathing, cooking and cleaning and to ensure the proper functioning of sanitation facilities. This will result in reduced risk of communicable diseases, improved individual and public health, reduced demands on host facilities and a greater measure of dignity for the displaced and vulnerable populations.

PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

As described above, the crisis continues to evolve on a daily basis. Mercy Corps' decade of experience in Lebanon provides us with important connections and an ideal network for monitoring this situation and adapting our plans as necessary. Mercy Corps works in close coordination with local and national government officials and participates actively in coordination with other aid agencies and the United Nations. Our longstanding relationships with communities in the south of the country will help us rapidly organize relief activities there when a reduction in the scale of attacks or the opening of humanitarian access to the region makes that possible. At the same time, continued fighting in the south may result in a full-scale exodus of the population to relatively safer areas nearer to Beirut. In that case, Mercy Corps will be ready to expand our existing distribution activities to meet this contingency. As in all emergencies, the emphasis will be on flexibility in the timing, location and exact nature of the relief activities. At the same time, all the available information and our institutional experience convince us that the activities outlined above will continue to be priorities under almost any scenario for the next several months.

BUDGET SUMMARY (US\$)

ACTIVITY	COST
Food Package Distribution	175,000
Non-Food Emergency Distribution	120,000
Water and Sanitation	140,000
Operational Support	65,000
TOTAL COST	\$500,000