

Minutes of Northern Lebanon ad-hoc Inter - Agency Meeting

09 August 2019, 10:00 – 12:00
 UNHCR Tripoli Office

Chairperson(s)	Anne Dolan (UNHCR) Alain Chatry (UNDP) Khaled Osman (MoSA)
Agenda of the Meeting	Updates on Raids and Demolition of Hard Structures in northern Lebanon

Introduction:

During May 2019, based on a decision by the High Defense Council, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF/I) visited informal settlements in Lebanon to implement the decision to dismantle hard structures in such settlements. This activity started in Arsal and was then extended to some informal settlements in northern Lebanon. The activities were put on hold in June, but resumed on 7 August, with raids on a number of informal settlements and demolition of hard structures in four settlements.

These dramatic developments led the inter-agency secretariat in northern Lebanon to call for this ad hoc inter agency meeting to keep partners informed of the recent events and agree on the needed follow-up actions.

Presentation on raids and demolition of hard structures in informal settlements:

A presentation was made by UNHCR on the LAF raids that took place in 33 informal settlements in Akkar on 7 and 8 August, which apart from demolition of 445 hard structures also resulted in the arrest of at least 47 refugees, mostly for lacking valid legal residency.

Starting on 7 August 2019, LAF resumed their raids on informal settlements to identify hard structures and in some cases demolish the hard structures found on site. The implementation of the High Defense Council decision this week differs from the approach in May, as the LAF did not provide prior notification to some of the affected sites to dismantle their hard structures. The raids resulted in significant damage to shelters and some belongings, such as core relief items. The way in which the raids were conducted, in some cases with a large presence of LAF personnel, was also very traumatizing for the camp residents, in particular children.

It was further noticed that the LAF this time are using different criteria to dismantle hard structures from one site to another or even within the same site, causing confusion among residents and humanitarian organizations. In Arsal, shelters with up to 5 bricks height (one meter) were permitted, while no permitted wall height was communicated during the LAF raids in May in the North.

The sites affected by dismantlement are as follows;

- Kherbet Daoud (Kafr 001) informal settlement: the short wall masonry structures inside 93 tents were destroyed during a raid by the army without providing an advance warning. The families were informed by LAF members that another visit will be conducted to make sure that all structures are removed.
- Rihanieh site: LAF members approached the site managed by URDA at 5:30 am, hosting 222 households and destroyed 340 makeshift shelters that have short masonry wall structures, in addition to shops that were initially built by the landlord and used as markets. The demolition also affected the plastic sheeting attached to the concrete structures or other CRI materials.
- Bebnine 001: 9 Hard structures were partially demolished by LAF
- Ouadi El-Jamous 035: LAF demolished 3-layer blocks inside two shelters, which were constructed for protection against vermin or for flood mitigation.

It was also reported just before the meeting that the LAF has visited the families in some sites in Wadi Khaled and notified them to dismantle hard structures, asking them to disseminate the message in surrounding sites.

Presentation on hard structures in the North and Emergency Response Mechanisms:

- The emergency response in the North is reactive; no prior notice or deadline was communicated to the refugees:
- Rapid Needs Assessment will be carried out by RNA partners, and based on the geosplit. Assessments are to be conducted through the EOS – IA national tool developed specifically for the hard structures emergencies.
- Since the decision of the Higher Defense Council, sites hosting 4 and more hard structures (Type 1, 2, and 3) have been profiled and mapped through the EOS. In total, 319 structures were mapped: 60 Type 1, 233 Type 2, 26 Type 3. However, in total and as per the IAMP, 264 sites were identified to be hosting 533 hard structures, with majority below 4 structures in one site.
- Moreover, many targeted sites or structures did not fit any of the Typologies for hard structures, as they are simple makeshift shelters with up to 4 layers block, usually constructed for flood mitigation. As a result, the estimates for sites or shelters to be targeted remain challenging and unpredictable.
- The response will be coordinate through the IA emergency response mechanisms; referrals to sectors will be communicated through sector leads.

Discussions on the LAF raid and demolition campaign:

- URDA highlighted the different approaches between Bekaa and North regarding the dismantlement
 - URDA a few years ago invited the LAF to assess the construction of shelters on the site, which they approved and set to 4 bricks high (80 centimeters)

- Even within the same site, there was an inconsistency in the approach to dismantlement of hard structures.
- There was no prior notice from the LAF to Rihaniyeh residents or URDA that the site would be demolished. If they had been notified, URDA would have taken action to dismantle the structures.
- URDA will hire a contractor to remove the rubble in the Rihaniyeh camp, which will be used in construction sites.
- It was highlighted by the MoSA coordinator in the North that the High Defense Council requested to remove all hard structures in informal settlements back in May 2019. A nationwide deadline for complying with this order was set at 1 July. LAF in the North postponed the demolition temporarily in the past due to certain circumstances, yet it was not waved off.
- A meeting was conducted between MoSA, the LAF commander in the north, jointly with the Governor of Akkar and other stakeholders during the last months on this decision, yet no clear message from LAF was shared with regards to the dates of implementation, criteria, process, locations etc...
- Questions were raised by partners about the communication with refugees in light of the changed approach from the LAF to the implementation of the High Defense Council decision. UNHCR clarified that in previous discussions in northern Lebanon, the inter agency meeting agreed that the counseling lines of the national Hard Structure SOP would be followed if refugees have been notified by the LAF to dismantle hard structures. In case refugees have not yet been notified, a more cautious approach would be taken to avoid that refugees perceive humanitarian workers as the messengers of government decisions. The meeting suggested that this cautious approach still appears valid, but that partners that go to sites with hard structures should carry some brief counseling lines to inform refugees of the LAF campaign. UNHCR will check what communication was used with refugees in the Bekaa and a new meeting will be called in the coming week of sector leads to discuss this issue further.
- On the response to the raids and demolitions, a meeting will take place with RNA partners right after this inter agency meeting, to discuss the assessment tools to be used in sites with hard structures. The response will follow the RNA structure in place in northern Lebanon, where sector referrals will be made based on the RNA assessment carried out in affected sites and following existing geo splits developed by each sector.
- Contact was already made with the northern Lebanon Child Protection Sector Lead to seek to mobilize child protection partners to conduct PSS activities in sites affected by raids and demolitions.
- UNHCR thanked the partners that have been referring raid and arrest cases to UNHCR in the past two days and asked them to continue these referrals as soon as they become aware of an LAF raid.

Action Plan:

- Advocacy regarding the raids and demolitions will continue at the local and national level. UNHCR to re-approach the LAF/I to advocate and clarify the army's timeline of implementation or action plan for the IA to work around and support in a safe and dignified implementation of this activity.
- UNHCR North will check on the communication strategy and materials used in the hard structure campaign in Aarsal and call for an inter sector meeting next week to discuss;