

OPERATIONS UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

LEBANON: EMERGENCY SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE RED CROSS AMBULANCE SERVICES

20 July 2005

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

Appeal No. 05EA006;
Operations Update no. 1;
Period covered: April - June;
Appeal coverage: [<click here for live coverage>](#)

Appeal history:

- Launched on 11 April 2005 for CHF 387,000 (USD 320,550 or EUR 249,814) for 3 months
- Operation extended by 2 months; Final Report is therefore due on September 2005.
- Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) allocated: CHF 100,000

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals: [<click here>](#)

Operational Summary: The severe financial situation in the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) is not resolved as the political crisis in Lebanon continues. Government funds to support the ambulance services are still absent as the state budget for 2005 has yet to be approved. With funding from the International Federation, the LRC has maintained a minimum of life-saving services for the population, but is desperately in need of further assistance to cope with the increase in demand for their services at a time when Lebanon is gripped by political instability and targeted assassinations of politicians.

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Background

Following the constitutional amendment of 3 October 2004, allowing a 3-year extension of President Emile Lahoud's initial 6-year term, Lebanon has witnessed considerable political turmoil. On 14 February, former Prime Minister Rafik al Hariri was killed together with 19 of his staff when a powerful bomb ripped through his motorcade in the centre of Beirut. More than 40 people were seriously injured. Lebanon has since experienced several mass demonstrations and a series of car bombs targeting business districts in and near the capital Beirut, as well as prominent politicians and journalists. During these demonstrations, the Red Cross transported 92 people to hospitals and offered first aid to 1147 people through the efforts of 682 volunteers.

The political rift prevented the Lebanese Parliament from passing a budget law in preparation for the state budget of 2005. As 80% of the total income of the Lebanese Red Cross is coming from the Government through the state budget, critical services have been suffering a severe shortage of funds since the beginning of 2005, most notably the life saving first aid/ambulance services.



***In action:** Lebanese Red Cross at the scene of the site where former PM Hariri was killed.*

the opposition were killed in car bomb attacks. The first attack occurred Monday 13 June, when Samir Kassir, a well known journalist, was killed. The second car bomb killed Georges Hawi, former leader of the Lebanese Communist Party on Tuesday 21 June. On 12 July, a bomb ripped through the motorcade of Elias Murr, Lebanon's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister (also son-in-law of President Emile Lahoud), injuring Murr and killing his body guard.

The government resigned on 28 February in face of popular protests, and after several failed attempts, a new government of national unity was finally appointed 19 April to prepare for Parliamentary elections in May/June. Following the elections, there have been 4 failed attempts at forming a government.

On 18 March, the first in a series of car bombs targeting predominantly Christian neighbourhoods of Beirut started to go off. A total of 4 car bombs resulted in 3 deaths, 23 seriously injured persons and 78 people with minor injuries treated at the scene. Although causing mainly material damage, the bombs have certainly increased people's fear over a return to the situation experienced during Lebanon's devastating civil war (1975-1990). In the run up to and during the elections, two prominent members of

***On the spot:** Red Cross teams respond in the wake of a car bomb in a suburb of Beirut*



The unprecedented political situation in Lebanon has left a considerable gap between the high level of mandated LRC services provided and halt of funding from the government. The LRC first aid/ambulance services have continued their regular missions, as well as responding to the extraordinary needs during demonstrations and car

bombings. This massive increase in missions is not sustainable and the LRC reserves are not sufficient to keep this essential and life saving service at the necessary operational level.

Operational developments

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Objective: Ensure continuation of life-saving ambulance/first aid services to the population of Lebanon until the state budget is agreed.

Progress/Achievements:

The immediate release of CHF 100,000 from DREF gave the Lebanese Red Cross the ability to continue with the most critical and life-saving missions. The funds were mainly spent to cover fuel bills, essential repairs and per diem for staff working day-time shifts during the week. The other contributions were transferred to the LRC, when received by the delegation, and immediately spent. The actual needs are far greater if the LRC were to be fully operational as per the agreement with the government and actual needs on the ground. The running costs of stations are not being paid, relying instead on generous contributions of the volunteers and their families and friends. Essential protective gear has not been procured either.

There is a substantial backlog of bills as no government funds have been received in 2005 at all. As a result, operational readiness is reduced, and will continue to be so as critical funding is still missing. The emergency appeal was launched with the understanding that the parliamentary elections held in May/June would produce a government capable of presenting a budget for approval, including funding for the LRC. However, political deadlock over positions and size of the Cabinet has so far led to four failed attempts at forming a new government. It means that the LRC will not realistically receive funds before early August at the earliest.



At the sharp end: Looking for survivors at the site of the Hariri bombing.

At the Federation's initiative, a joint ICRC/Norwegian RC EMS (Emergency Medical Services) assessment mission took place 18-27 June. The objective was to assess the operational capacity of the Lebanese Red Cross in first aid and ambulance services (EMS), and determine opportunities for operational cooperation and capacity building between the Movement partners and the Lebanese Red Cross. The key areas of the assessment included:

- strengths and weaknesses of the current EMS of the LRC
- review the operating environment of the LRC emergency services, including statutes, legal base, communications, coordination mechanisms, human resources, information policies and emblem use

On the positive side, the assessment concluded that 'the LRC provides an effective and efficient first aid/ambulance service to the public, meeting the needs for immediate response in time of acute illness and injury, with the provision of a basic, first aid level ambulance service'. It also concluded that the 'organizational structure of the operational EMS side appears to support the effective reporting of centre activity, both operationally and administratively, to the HQ'. However, 'the total contribution of all donors does not cover the day-to-day operating expenses, let alone allow the LRC to develop a strategy for short, mid or long-term sustainability of the service. As such, there is a serious threat to the survivability of the LRC first aid/ambulance services, unless *immediate* steps are taken to develop a department strategy and improve funding'. By conservative estimates, the government only covers half of the actual costs, with these funds now absent; the situation is extremely critical.

Impact:

With financial assistance from the Federation, the LRC ambulance/first aid services have continued to provide services from their 42 stations in Lebanon. Due to the extraordinary circumstances in Lebanon, the number of missions January-April 2005 is up 7% compared with the same period in 2004. However, the types of missions have changed with a reduction in routine transportations and a sharp increase in emergency ones. This requires additional resources, at a time when these are not available. Of the 42 centres, only 8 to 10 can rely on local fund-raising. The others are now only surviving on Federation support.



Teamwork: Red Cross personnel work together in extreme circumstances.

Constraints:

The continued insecurity in Lebanon with no government formation, political unrest, assassinations, demonstrations and increased demand for ambulance services makes the future uncertain. It is also difficult to negotiate with the interim government, as they are virtually powerless whilst a new government is in formation. The Lebanese Red Cross has also exhausted all their own financial means, with little or no possibility at this stage to ensure more funds.

Federation Coordination

The Federation and the LRC remain in close contact with the Ministry of Health, where the situation is well-known. The Federation also worked closely with the EMS assessment team of the ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross.