

Friday, June 11th, 2021

Grand Serail

Presidency of the Council of Ministers

Press Office

Under the auspices of Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab, the launching ceremony of Beirut City Profile, published by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, took place at the Grand Serail. The ceremony was attended by UN Deputy Special Coordinator, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon, Dr. Najat Rochdi, United Nations Under Secretary-General and UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat Regional Representative for the Arab States, Dr. Erfan Ali, Head of UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme, Taina Christiansen, Deputy Head of UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme, Tarek Osseiran, representatives of UN agencies in Lebanon, Qatar's Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammed Hassan Jaber Al Jaber, in addition to Ministers Demianos Kattar, Ramzi Musharrafieh, and Ghada Chreim.

Christiansen

At the outset, Mrs. Christiansen made the following remarks:

“It is a great honour for UN-Habitat to welcome you to the launch of the UN-Habitat Beirut City Profile, under the patronage of His Excellency the President of the Council of Ministers, Dr. Hassan Diab, who is honouring us with his presence and their excellencies the ministers, along with Ms. Mohd Sharif and Dr. Rochdi.

Thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join us today – as we present to you a detailed report about the Beirut City within the framework of urban crisis response and recovery efforts. Globally and regionally, UN-Habitat is well-known for the development of multisectoral urban profiles, which provide valuable data and analysis on urban areas with the aim of informing programming – including recovery plans – and coordination among state and non-state actors. In recent years, more than 30 city and 80 neighbourhood profiles have been published by UN-Habitat in other Arab states. In Lebanon, more specifically, UN-Habitat has a long history and great expertise in profiling cities and neighbourhoods. The Beirut City Profile comes to enrich our growing profiling portfolio in Lebanon, which so far includes two city profiles on Tripoli and Tyre, and over 29 neighbourhood profiles, mostly on disadvantaged areas across the country, produced with UNICEF. These profiles have been largely used to guide local development interventions. Effective urban crisis response has been a key focus area of UN-Habitat’s work in Lebanon since its establishment in the country in 2006. In close coordination with local authorities and the national government, and along with other humanitarian and development actors – we have undertaken a wide range of evidence-based projects in response to the multiple crises that have shocked the country in the past years. But beyond emergency response, UN-Habitat also strives to plan for, and implement programmes that address medium-to-longer-term urban development. The Beirut City Profile, along with our other profiles, is an important analytical tool to bridge this humanitarian-development nexus. I wish to take a moment to gratefully acknowledge the generous support of NORCAP and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for generously funding the development of the Beirut City Profile. Furthermore, I would like to recognize the generous cooperation, advice and information provided by municipalities and unions of municipalities covered in this report. Other United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners kindly gave their

advice and time to the process of developing and reviewing the profile, as well as provided valuable data for the analysis. Several academics have also kindly provided time and knowledge to inform the profile. It is great to see some of these contributors here today”.

Afterwards, Ms. Ida Zeline Lien, UN-Habitat Consultant and Head of Analysis, Urban-A gave a presentation of the Beirut City Profile, its objectives, findings, and recommendations.

Rochdi

Then, UN Deputy Special Coordinator, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon, Najat Rochdi, delivered the following statement:

“Last week, I was introduced virtually to 5 touching human stories that reflect the painful and bitter reality of the current economic situation in Lebanon, which is unfortunately worsening by the day. One of these stories is about “Youssef”, a 59-year old Lebanese man who has been recently living in the streets of Beirut, unintentionally ‘Homeless’ and ‘Hopeless’! His dream is simply to “have a door that he can close when he sleeps and a roof above his head”. Yet, his dream is universally considered as one of the most basic human rights.

It is no surprise to all of you that the situation in Lebanon continues to deteriorate steadily and has become intolerable for ordinary people like Youssef, who are bearing the brunt of the economic and financial meltdown, the disastrous impact of the Beirut port explosions, and the delays to form a fully-empowered Government to implement meaningful reform and recovery.

The horrendous 4th of August explosions have dramatically affected the city's infrastructure. It changed the face of Beirut and sent many households into precarious housing situations, exacerbating livelihood conditions, particularly for those who were already in inadequate or insecure shelter. Thousands of houses were damaged or destroyed by the explosions, leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless or living in areas still at risk... I have personally met families who have had their homes and futures blown away, their children who no longer feel safe in their own home and neighborhood... People who have reiterated to me the importance of sending back their children to school so they can hope for a better future, and the need to restoring their houses for their own safety and protection, and to preserve their dignity and personal wellbeing.

The current unusual and unprecedented crises facing Lebanon required from us unusual ways of working. The UN Country team, through its 26 specialized UN entities, were entirely geared to support Lebanon in responding to its multi-faceted crises in a rapid, coordinated and prioritized way and on different fronts as well as support the Government of Lebanon and the people of Lebanon, with a firm commitment to defend their rights to dignity, peace and justice. Depending on their mandates, United Nations agencies operating in the country have focused on helping address different aspects of humanitarian and longer-term development challenges – governance, economy and livelihoods, social protection and stability; basic and social services; housing; environment; and cultural heritage. At the same time, we have set up coordination mechanisms to capitalize on synergies and avoid overlaps in our response and recovery efforts.

Alongside humanitarian efforts deployed in response to the devastating port explosions, we developed - together with the European Union and the World Bank Group- and in close collaboration with the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanon's Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (known as the 3RF) that is fundamentally for the people. The 3RF is a people-centred recovery and reconstruction framework that aims to bridge the immediate humanitarian response and the medium-term recovery and reconstruction efforts to put Lebanon on a path of sustainable development. It is about the people who lost their houses, it's about the families who lost their beloved ones, it's about the people who lost their daily bread, hope and businesses and lost years of hardly won savings. The 3RF promotes an integrated approach across all sectors and is guided by the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusion. The 3RF has adopted a new way of working between the government of Lebanon, the international community and Civil Society Organizations. As we speak, an Independent Oversight Body (IOB) led by Civil Society, is laying the groundwork for an effective oversight of the 3RF implementation. Housing is at the center of the 3RF priorities and projects that revolve around reconstructing damaged houses and historic buildings as well as the infrastructure, including the upgrading of affected and vulnerable neighborhoods of the poor and most vulnerable.

The UN-Habitat Beirut City Profile that we are launching today is a key reference to support the 3RF process. It provides a much-needed spatial perspective of the damaged neighborhoods and demolished spaces and serves as an important basis for all stakeholders who are seeking to contribute to the ongoing recovery and reconstruction of Beirut.

Most importantly, the Beirut City Profile offers an important opportunity to reflect on the multidimensional needs of the residents, through a comprehensive, multisectoral and area-based approach to analyzing and diagnosing the capital city. In a highly urbanized country like Lebanon, making urban data and analysis available has proven essential to respond to unpredictable crises and to help build and increase the resilience of the city of Beirut and its residents to future similar shocks. Adequate housing is universally viewed as one of the most basic human needs. For me, it is much more than just a roof. It's a home, a source of safety and a must to preserve human dignity! To make Lebanon safer and more sustainable, we need to take action. In this regard, the Beirut City Profile, along with other city and neighbourhood profiles that UN-Habitat has been tirelessly producing for the past months, are valuable resources to use in our joint endeavours to "Build Back Better" and wiser.

I call upon all concerned stakeholders, those among us today and beyond, to make the best use of these resources as they provide an important evidence base in our steady efforts to build strong communities and more inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities".

Sharif

Afterwards, United Nations Under Secretary-General and UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, delivered the following remarks:

“I am honoured to be here with you today, under the auspices of His Excellency, the President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic, Dr. Hassan Diab, to launch the Beirut City Profile published by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency for enabling the launch of this important work, to take place here at the Grand Serail. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Government of Lebanon and the local authorities in Beirut and beyond for the excellent collaboration. I am furthermore grateful to Norway – through NORCAP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for their generous contribution, enabling the writing of this important profile. Thank you for the interesting presentation, Ida. Before proceeding to share a few points about the profile itself, I wish to provide some background on UN-Habitat’s contribution towards the collective response and recovery of Beirut City. On 4 August 2020, UN-Habitat joined hands with the wider humanitarian and development community. We deployed teams to the municipalities of Beirut and Bourj Hammoud, and led on rapid building-level damage assessments, providing technical and coordination expertise. We offered immediate shelter assistance through repairs and rental assistance – and are working with partners to rehabilitate schools and health facilities.”

Together with partners, we mobilised quickly to ensure that rubble was collected and stored, ensuring green and sustainable debris management solutions. We engaged in UN coordination, through co-leading the shelter sector, complementing national efforts underway by the Lebanese Red Cross and the Lebanese Armed Forces, ensuring rapid and coordinated shelter assistance was deployed to those affected the most.

Through generous funding from donors, we are rehabilitating buildings severely damaged by the explosion, while also upgrading public spaces, communal infrastructure – applying a build back better, greener and more resilient approach. The conservation of heritage through these interventions is paramount.

UN-Habitat is advancing discussion with the World Bank to implement a new recovery project, under the Lebanon Financing Facility, focusing on Beirut Housing Reconstruction and Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries Recovery. Since 2006, UN-Habitat has grounded its interventions in Lebanon – at national, local and community level – in a multi-sectoral and holistic approach. We believe that through ensuring the connectivity of humanitarian and development assistance – from a participatory approach – ensures higher sustainability and responds to the actual needs of communities.

Underpinning our interventions is the generation of evidence-based decision-making, which contributes to more accountable and transparent governance, not only through implementation, but also when monitoring and evaluating them. The Beirut City Profile provides a cross-sectoral and spatial analysis to help inform a common understanding of how multiple crises and vulnerabilities manifest across the capital, which was clearly indicated in the presentation.

The profile's analysis highlights existing city systems. For example, unlike other cities in Lebanon, there is no single authority in charge of what makes up the Greater Beirut City. The greater built-up area of Beirut, encompassing 31 municipalities, is consequently left without formal mechanisms to respond to the larger system which they are a part of. Recognition of this fact is paramount in diagnosing the state of Beirut.

Insufficient service provision affects all, and particularly vulnerable segments of Beirut's population, who experience systemic inequities in access to services and have fewer financial resources and social safety nets to make up for these gaps. This includes many women, youth, disabled persons, refugees, working migrants and low- or unskilled Lebanese men. This is only a brief sampling of the rich analysis captured by the profile. Above all, it offers an analysis on governance structures' respective capacities to absorb shocks and suggests how these can be further strengthened to help the city bounce back and transform from a current fragile status towards a resilient and inclusive city.

The Beirut City Profile also guides the longer-term recovery of Beirut. A set of principles has been put forward based on the diagnosis. The principles support the operationalisation of identified short to medium-term priorities of the UN, World Bank, and EU Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) using a spatial lens.

Specifically, the principles may also inform Track 1 of the 3RF on socio-economic recovery that addresses the urgent needs of the most vulnerable populations and businesses affected by the explosion. They can also inform track 2 efforts related to the reform and reconstruction track, focusing on critical reforms to address governance and recovery. Longer-term urban recovery efforts at the city and national scale – considering policy, reform, and planning measures – are also offered.

Lebanon is one of the most urbanized countries in both the world and the Arab region, with almost 90 per cent of its population living in urban areas, including most of its refugee population. Most of its population reside along the major coastal cities – in Tripoli, Beirut, Saida and Tyre. The holistic, multi-sectoral, interconnected, and sustainable urban recovery of Beirut, and all cities in Lebanon, will play a significant role in the future recovery of the country.

It is my hope that this Beirut City Profile will offer the Government of Lebanon, as well as all stakeholders, a much needed and deserved evidence base, upon which to design future interventions, and capitalize on the benefits that good and sustainable urbanization can offer”.

PM Diab

Then, Premier Diab addressed the audience, saying:

“Today, we meet in recognition of the UN-Habitat achievement which is “Beirut City Profile 2021”.

Let me say, at the outset, that in the context of compounding cycles of multifaceted crises that have shaken our country, the Government of Lebanon turned to International Organizations and friendly countries for assistance. I am pleased to say that the United Nations’ Organization has been very responsive to our various appeals. The close relation between the UN and Lebanon, a co-founder of the UN and a major player in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is based on mutual and full trust. Indeed, it has materialized in all areas of activities, be they in the South to maintain international peace and security or across Lebanon to promote development and recovery. In a further step along the arduous path of recovery, the UN-Habitat has produced “The Beirut City Profile” whose launch I am delighted to celebrate as we were gratified with the 3RF, a valuable UN, EU and World Bank multilateral response to meet the needs of the Lebanese people in the aftermath of the port of Beirut explosion.

In this regard, while we are grateful for UN-Habitat’s various activities and recent contribution, the conclusions outlined in “Beirut City Profile” as well as in “3RF” should not be considered incongruous elements. Similar to civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other hand, I believe that these conclusions are indivisible as they complement each other.

In this report, Beirut is depicted as “a capital city in a state of crisis ... rather than faced by multiple crises”. Its precarious situation is not only due to the recent shocks severely impacting the livelihoods of the Lebanese people but also to key endemic and long-standing structural barriers manifested at the city level and far beyond the surrounding neighborhoods physically affected by the blast. No wonder the UN-Habitat’s report focuses on Beirut given that the vast majority of Lebanese reside in the cities and primarily in the capital, whose port is the heartbeat of Lebanon.

As defined by UN-Habitat, the built up area of greater Beirut encompasses 31 municipalities which lack accurate, updated, multi-sectoral and detailed urban data.

As envisaged, without developing a well-rounded understanding and diagnosis of the current situation in this area, there cannot be effective prescriptions for a holistic approach and the allocation of funds to improve the quantity and quality of municipality services. I look forward to seeing how national and local authorities as well as international and local organizations can make use of the extensive analysis this report offers to strengthen resilience and bring about recovery at the city level and at other parts of Lebanon.

Actually, making the whole of Lebanon resilient, not just Beirut, has been a major undertaking of the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers since 2010. This priority is now more pressing than ever. In conducting its business, the DRM is fully engaged to mainstream strategies, policies and frameworks. Reinforcing DRM capacities will surely assist in increasing the resilience of a country prone to disaster risks.

In meticulously portraying the precarious conditions prevailing in Beirut, I noted that the UN-Habitat's report revealed "some worrying signs for what comes next" if these conditions were not addressed in a proper and timely manner. These conditions include and I quote: "increased tensions between groups in Beirut along social, ethnic, nationality and religious fault lines, hunger-crime, food security problems across the country, pre-existing divisions, pockets of high density, overcrowded and poorly serviced accommodations". While I do not underestimate the concerns of UN-Habitat in this regard, I would like, for the sake of clarity, to make the following observations:

1- My Government was formed of technocrat ministers in the wake of the October 2019 uprising and in response to the outcries of the Lebanese people. We started a reform process based on a master plan for financial, economic, social recovery and structural reforms, whose merits the International Community acknowledged. However, the port of Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020 was a turning point in the Government's lifespan as I resigned to make headway for a new Government that enjoys the widest political support.

2- By now, it is well understood that our mission was not restricted to the unprecedented, concurrent and successive crises but also included a legacy of mismanagement and protracted problems.

3- *In all democracies, conceptual differences are normal in a vibrant and diverse society. However, they become greater and bolder under strenuous circumstances. Despite this fact, I trust the ability of the Lebanese people to overcome their differences and achieve understanding. These Lebanese differences are not irreconcilable; they are regretfully manipulated for political ends. I totally concur with UN-Habitat itself on reporting that “the post-October 2019 civil uprising and the solidarity displayed after the 4 August blast illustrate how people come together in the face of extreme difficulties ... and how impressive the capacity of volunteers was to mobilize work on the ground in the immediate aftermath of the blast”. Moreover, I am convinced that these circumstances were a driving force which unveiled the unifying spirit of the Lebanese people.*

4- *In my academic and public life, I lived by 2 guiding principles which are transparency and accountability. I strongly believe that they constitute a steady pathway to Lebanon’s recovery. To expedite the process, I reiterate my call to the Lebanese politicians to stop the political bickering, to urgently form an inclusive Government and carry on the reforms initiated by my Government.*

Finally, I would like to convey my deep appreciation to UN-Habitat for all the efforts invested to produce the report, hoping that its evidence bases will be shared with all concerned stakeholders and its recommendations applied. Furthermore, I am heartened to note the thoughtful attention given in the report to “Beirut City’s rich cultural heritage and identity which span more than 5000 years”. Such a rich background is a compelling reason to bounce back. In fact, it is Lebanon’s destiny to survive all traumas and hazards while its majestic cities navigate a long journey through history”.

Ali

Finally, Dr. Erfan Ali, UN-Habitat Regional Representative, delivered the following closing remarks:

“Thank you very much for joining us today, as we launched the publication of this rich and informative new report on Beirut City. We are most grateful for His Excellency, Dr. Hassan Diab’s presence today, as well as that of Dr. Najat Rochdi. Thank you for taking the time and for your most insightful remarks. As we have become familiar with the main objectives, findings and recommendations put forward by the Beirut City Profile – and have together discussed its significance as a tool – UN-Habitat looks forward to seeing how it can contribute to the promotion of transformative, inclusive, and resilient urban recovery and development for the long term. The diagnosis that is offered in the profile, which was presented by Ida, underscores several critical points. It covers the Greater Beirut City, encompassing 31 municipalities. By using the continuously built-up area, this report underscores that most of the issues facing Beirut – and the interconnectedness of economic, social, environmental, and political systems by which these manifest – are on a scale that extends much beyond the most central areas of the city and the administrative boundaries of Beirut Municipality. Recognition of this fact is paramount in diagnosing the state of Beirut City. It offers an important analysis on urban governance structures’ respective capacities to absorb shocks and suggests how these can be further strengthened to help the city bounce back and transform from a current fragile state towards a resilient and inclusive city.”

It is not possible to present and discuss all aspects of this important piece of work during a short launch event. However, we hope this will mark the beginning of a series of more detailed and interactive events or consultative meetings, that will give the opportunity to delve more deeply into the Beirut City Profile and allow for setting up a concrete way forward to put its recommendations into action. The involvement of national and local governmental actors and other relevant stakeholders in this process is crucial.

Regionally, UN-Habitat has vast experience in leading such evidence-based, multisectoral urban recovery efforts. We have been very active in this regard in Syria and Iraq, as well in urban development context as Saudi Arabia and Egypt for example. The lessons we have learned and the solid tools we have developed in these different settings – combined with the expertise present and close partnerships we have developed in Lebanon – place UN-Habitat at the forefront of such efforts in this country too. I would like to welcome your continued and expert engagement throughout the different phases of the urban recovery efforts we are undertaking in Beirut, with a vast range of partners, and thank the Government of Lebanon and multiple municipalities for engaging with us on this approach.”

It is worth-mentioning that, following the Beirut Port explosion, UN-Habitat has recently finalized a comprehensive report, entitled the Beirut City Profile. The report offers an important multisectoral and spatial analysis about the City of Beirut, including a diagnosis of the wide spectrum of challenges that the city has encountered over the past decades, including the most recent and devastating shock, the Beirut Port explosion. The profile aims to help offer a common understanding of how multiple shocks and vulnerabilities manifest across the city. The multi-scale approach used is key for an urban recovery response, to link local needs with city systems, and enabling national policies and regulations. The analysis highlights existing systems and governance structures' respective capacities to absorb shocks and suggests how these can be further strengthened to help the city bounce back and transform from a current fragile state towards a resilient and inclusive city.