

Statement by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon

Fuel crisis jeopardizes health and water systems in Lebanon

Reliable fuel and electricity supply urgently needed to avoid catastrophe

Beirut, 17 August 2021 – Fuel shortages threaten the provision of essential health and water services across Lebanon, putting thousands of families in Lebanon at risk of a humanitarian catastrophe.

“I am deeply concerned about the impact of the fuel crisis on access to health care and water supply for millions of people in Lebanon,” said Ms. Najat Rochdi, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon. “A bad situation only stands to get worse unless an instant solution is found.”

The largest hospitals in Lebanon have already reduced their activities due to fuel and electricity shortages. Meanwhile, public water supply and wastewater treatment systems that are heavily reliant on fuel, have drastically reduced operations all over Lebanon, leaving millions of people without access to public water and jeopardizing the environmental and public health.

As a result of the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country, the health system is facing significant threats of limited liquidity, medication shortages and emigration of medical staff. Hundreds of health care workers have left the country while essential medications, such as chronic diseases treatments and antibiotics, are unavailable. With Lebanon facing another wave of COVID-19 cases, the current fuel crisis has the potential to worsen the health situation. Continued shortages may compromise the delivery of lifesaving treatments. Reports suggest that Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds for COVID-19 are already a quarter full, with most patients relying on ventilators. An interruption of electricity would hence jeopardize their eventual recovery.

Meanwhile, Beirut and Mount Lebanon water authorities suffered a weeklong shutdown due to power cuts while their counterparts in the North and the South faced depleted fuel stocks and growing social tensions and insecurity. Electricité du Liban (EDL) has halted main power service lines to Water Establishments which affect the lives of approximately 4 million people in the country. In parallel, water authorities are confronted with limited availability and affordability of water supply consumables such as chlorine and spare parts for pumping stations. Overall, water shortages raise the risk of increased infection rates and disease outbreaks. Livelihoods, agricultural damage and food insecurity may also follow unless a solution is found.

Prioritizing restored power supply from EDL is critical to maintain lifeline services for the people, such as health and water systems. Fuel shortages will further disrupt the delivery of any humanitarian assistance. “The risks are simply too great,” warned Ms. Rochdi. “All stakeholders must work together to find a sustainable and equitable solution that serves the needs of all and protects the health and safety of communities,” she added.

Ms. Rochdi also notes that humanitarian partners, including UN agencies, stand ready to provide assistance to affected populations across Lebanon.

