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PRESS RELEASE

A new Regional Technical Office (RTO) brings local governance closer to the community of Bourj Hammoud

Beirut, 20 May 2022 – In line with its efforts to support local authorities in addressing current socio-economic and basic service challenges, and within the framework of the Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Programme (MERP) implemented jointly by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through funding from the European Union, the Regional Technical Office (RTO) in Bourj Hammoud was inaugurated today under the patronage of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. This milestone was announced during a press conference held at the Municipality of Bourj Hammoud.

"Administrative, legal and financial obstacles are preventing the municipalities from keeping pace with the development of municipal work in terms of human energies and technical resources. This RTO office provided the municipality with the necessary qualifications and equipment, it contributed to keeping pace with various initiatives and projects from the study phase to the design and monitoring until its implementation." Said Mayor of Bourj Hammoud Municipality, Mardig Boghossian.

The concept of the RTO was created and initiated by UN-Habitat since 2007 as a local tool that aims to strengthen local governance, enhance service delivery, and improve municipal planning. Performing as part of a municipality or union of municipalities (UoM), the RTO is comprised of local technical and social experts, who's role it is to support and enhance the planning and provision of public and municipal services based on their expertise.

"Lebanese municipalities and unions of municipalities are a solid core in the local and regional development process. It has become necessary for local authorities to have Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) that provide the needed technical expertise and play a leading role in formulating plans, preparing projects, and submitting proposals." Said DGLAC Director General, Faten Abou Hassan.

She added. "The Directorate General of Local Administrations and Councils (DGLAC) remains available to provide additional technical advice and necessary training courses on the legal and organizational framework that regulates municipal projects, financial management, and procurement, among others."

"UN-Habitat launched the first RTO in 2007 to empower unions in emergency response, planning, and development, and specifically to support housing reconstruction and local development in South Lebanon. Thanks to the great impact and success that RTOs have had on the ground, we widened its scope to also focus on longer-term development interventions by providing the technical support to assess, prioritize and design sound urban interventions that answer the needs of each area," said Taina Christiansen, UN-Habitat Head of Country Programme in Lebanon. "Today, we are extremely proud to inaugurate a new RTO with hopes that it will also achieve great results for a better urban future for the city and its residents," she added.

"Through MERP, UNDP has together with partner unions and municipalities, identified key basic service and local economic development interventions to support communities in these times of crisis; this includes, for instance, the rehabilitation of the fire department of the Urban Community of Al-Fayha'a and the rehabilitation of the 'Hesbe'

agricultural market in Tyre. UNDP has benefited from RTO expertise in reviewing the design and development of these initiatives.” Said Melanie Hauenstein, UNDP Resident Representative in Lebanon.

She added. “For the institutionalization of the RTO model to be ensured, it is crucial that development partners beyond UN-Habitat and UNDP engage with RTOs when implementing their local economic development and basic service projects.”

“In Lebanon, the EU is supporting municipalities and unions of municipalities to improve their resilience, support local sustainable planning, basic service delivery and economic development for all citizens and refugees. Through funding the establishment of Regional Technical Offices, the European Union empowers local government in Lebanon to better serve local residents”, said Alessia Squarcella, Deputy Head of Cooperation, Team Leader – Economy, Green Deal and Local Development, the European Union Delegation to Lebanon.

During the event the newly commissioned RTO Standard Operating Manual, Capacity Development Strategy, and the Exit Strategy, which will support the hand-over of the RTO from UN-Habitat to the respective municipal authority, were also launched and made available to municipalities and unions. The manual and strategies will serve as a guiding tool to ensure the sustainability of these offices and to preserve and enhance core competencies and skills while enabling RTOs to fulfil their mandate in an autonomous and self-sustaining fashion.

This event is delivered under the patronage of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, with support from the Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP). MERP is a joint initiative implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and is funded by the European Union through its Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis “Madad Fund”.

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Note to editors

About the Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP)

MERP is a joint project by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The Project is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) and funded by the European Union (EU), through its Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU “Madad Fund”. The project aims to strengthen the long-term resilience of subnational authorities in Lebanon as well as host communities and displaced persons affected by the Syrian crisis. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/3hBveux>

About the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Goal on cities, SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Learn more at www.unhabitat.org/lebanon or follow us on Twitter at @UNHabitatLB, on Facebook at UN-Habitat Lebanon and on Instagram at UNHabitatLB

About the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and the planet.

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About the European Union (EU)

The European Union supports Lebanon's stability, independence and sovereignty, its prosperity and democratic order. It strives also to help protect its environment and natural resources by supporting sustainable enterprise and development. The European Union is also committed to the promotion and protection of human rights in Lebanon including defending gender equality, children's rights and freedom of expression. The EU Delegation in Lebanon represents the European Union to the Republic of Lebanon with the objective to maintain and develop mutual beneficial relations. It engages in political, social and economic development activities on behalf of the European Union and based on the most pressing needs of the country of Lebanon.

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Learn more on [the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU Madad Fund](#), or follow on Twitter at @EU_NEAR, on Facebook at EU Neighbourhood & Enlargement and on Instagram at EU_NEAR