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PRESS RELEASE

Regional Technical Offices offer valuable solutions to Lebanese municipalities and unions of municipalities in strengthening local governance and enhancing municipal services

Beirut, 22 June 2022 – In line with its efforts to support municipalities and unions of municipalities in Lebanon, the Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP), which is implemented jointly by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the European Union, organized on the 21 June 2022 a discussion at Kempinski Hotel in Beirut, around Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) and the support that RTOs can provide to municipalities and unions in this area. The discussion involved key stakeholders from the Director General of Local Administrations and Councils, unions of municipalities and municipalities from across Lebanon and key international stakeholders and development partners.

This comes at a time where the current economic crisis is severely impacting communities as well as municipalities and Unions of Municipalities in Lebanon. Due to the crises, communities are increasingly turning to local authorities for basic services and employment opportunities. However, the crisis has also constrained municipalities and unions of municipalities in their ability to address these rising needs.

The concept of the RTO was created and initiated by UN-Habitat in 2007 as a local tool that aims to strengthen local governance, enhance service delivery, improve municipal planning, and respond to emergencies. The RTO, which performs as part of a municipality or union of municipalities, is comprised of local technical and social experts who support and enhance municipal planning and the provision of municipal services. Currently there are RTOs at the Union of Tyre Municipalities, the Urban Community Al-Fayhaa, and Bourj Hammoud Municipality. Since their inception, these RTOs have played a crucial role in overall development planning and the implementation of basic service and local economic development projects to address community needs.

“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.”

Eng. Hassan Dbouk, Head of Union of Tyre Municipalities, said “The Regional Technical Office is an efficient tool that support and contribute to well-designed local development plans through data collection, analysis and interpretation.”

“The discussion today, among local and international partners, is an opportunity to learn from each other, to discuss how RTOs can support municipalities and Unions in the current crisis period, what can be done to support establishing

new offices in other municipalities and unions, and how they can be sustained in the future.” Said Marija de Wijn, Chief Technical Advisor, MERP.

“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.

The discussion highlighted the importance of willingness of municipalities and unions of municipalities to ensure the sustainability of RTOs. This requires strong ownership of local authorities when establishing RTOs and in supporting their functioning. Another point highlighted is the need for RTO staff to be part of the national capacity development plan such as implemented by the Formation Center for Municipalities (CEFOM).

During the event, the newly commissioned RTO website page was launched (<https://unhabitat.org/project/regional-technical-office-rto>). The web page provides information about the role and functions of the RTO, along with tools to ensure the sustainability of these offices. These tools include the RTO Standard Operating Manual, Capacity Development Strategy for RTOs, and the Exit Strategy, which will support the hand-over of the RTO from UN-Habitat to the respective municipal authority.

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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