

Lebanon's Fragile Communities at Breaking Point: NGOs Call for Immediate Action to Protect Civilians and Prevent Further Displacement

As Lebanon has just begun recovering from the last wave of violence and displacement, renewed escalation is once again pushing the country toward a major humanitarian crisis, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee their homes. Civilian losses are already devastating, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health recorded 486 people killed as of March 9th, among them 83 children, and 1,130 people wounded. This escalation comes amid continued violations of the cessation of hostilities, with repeated incidents continuing to endanger civilians and destabilize affected areas.

Israeli airstrikes and directives forcing the evacuation of the entire South of Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut are triggering displacement on a dramatic scale, with severe humanitarian consequences being felt across the country. Displacement levels are already expected to exceed those witnessed during the 2024 escalation, when more than one million people were forced to flee their homes. After months of instability and repeated displacement, many families have already exhausted their coping mechanisms, leaving them with far fewer means to withstand yet another crisis. Thousands had not managed to return to their homes following the previous waves of displacement, remaining in temporary or precarious living conditions before being forced to move again. Entire communities are now fleeing simultaneously, often with little time to prepare or identify safe alternatives. Families are dispersing across the country in search of safety, placing additional pressure on areas already struggling with overstretched infrastructure, limited housing, strained public services, and creating additional tension in already fragile host communities.

Municipalities, host communities, and civil society organizations are demonstrating remarkable solidarity. However, the scale and speed of displacement are already overwhelming fragile local systems. Today, 538 collective shelters are open across the country, many of which urgently need additional support for shelter, water, sanitation, and basic supplies. At the same time, the growing number of displaced families is placing further pressure on health services, schools, housing, and livelihoods in host areas. Additional attention is needed for those who face the greatest challenges in displacement, including children, women, older persons, and people with disabilities.

Humanitarian organizations are mobilizing rapidly to respond wherever access allows. However, the humanitarian response in Lebanon was already significantly underfunded prior to this escalation.

Without immediate, flexible, and sustained support from the international community, humanitarian actors and local responders will struggle to meet the rapidly increasing needs of displaced families and host communities.

As humanitarian actors, we will continue to do our utmost to reach and assist civilians wherever they are. This includes families who have been unable to leave unsafe areas and remain exposed to ongoing bombardments. Many of those staying behind are among the most vulnerable, including older persons, people with disabilities, or those without the means to relocate. Recent developments affecting first responders and healthcare workers are particularly concerning. Civilians, medical personnel, and humanitarian workers must be protected at all times in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian assistance alone cannot keep pace with the scale and speed of suffering caused by continued hostilities. Urgent diplomatic action is required to de-escalate the situation, protect civilians, and prevent further displacement and destruction.

The Lebanon Humanitarian International NGO Forum calls for:

- An **immediate cessation of hostilities** to halt harm to civilians and further mass displacement across Lebanon.
- States with influence over the parties must use it to ensure **respect for international humanitarian law**, including the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and operations, medical teams, and compliance with the prohibition of unlawful weapons.
- Governments and donors to release **immediate, flexible, and increased funding** so first responders can sustain life-saving assistance. Enabling **urgent support for displaced families and host communities** through expanded shelter, cash, health, water, sanitation, education, and protection assistance.

The people of Lebanon have endured years of compounded crises with remarkable resilience. They should not be left to face another large-scale humanitarian emergency without decisive state action to enforce international humanitarian law, prevent further violations and release urgent, flexible funding for frontline responders.

(This statement reflects the endorsement of a majority of LHIF members).

The Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF) is an informal and independent coordinating body comprised of 73 international NGOs (INGOs) who are working to address the needs of vulnerable individuals, families, and communities throughout Lebanon. For questions, please contact inquiries@lhif.org

