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Lebanon:
Rebuilding Continues



Julie Poucher Harbin and Siri Elverland (12.07.2007)

One year after the war between Israel and Hezbollah, rebuilding efforts are ongoing in southern Lebanon. NRC is assisting 13 500 people with house repairs and rehabilitation. But the traces of war are still visible.

“When the shots finally ended everything in my life changed”, said 62 year old Salima recalling the summer days when bombs fell over her village in the Nabatiyeh district of southern Lebanon.

Tens of thousand of houses were damaged during Israel’s bombing of southern Lebanon last summer. The 34-day long war between the state of Israel and the armed group Hezbollah forced almost one million Lebanese from their homes. The war took over 1300 lives before it ended with the ceasefire on August 14.

Cluster Bombs

For the first three days of the war Salima hid in her home with her blind and asthmatic daughter (40) and mentally disabled son (26). After witnessing a nearby explosion, they fled to a neighbour’s house and stayed there until the war was over.

“I hurried to get back to my house. I just wanted to check if it was still standing”, said Salima.

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But a cluster bomb exploded as she walked down the stairs to her doorway, leaving Salima with stomach, head and hand injuries. According to the UN, millions of unexploded cluster bombs dropped by the Israelis in the closing days of the conflict still make large swathes of farmland inaccessible.

“Cluster bombs make it hazardous for people to farm their land and take care of their crops. Combined with damaged infrastructure this causes unemployment and a slow economy, which affects the whole community, not only families farming the land”, said NRC’s Country Director in Lebanon, Ulla Backlund.

House repairs

After the August 14 ceasefire people started returning to their homes in southern Lebanon, which suffered two thirds of the total war destructions in Lebanon. To support people’s own efforts, NRC implemented a rapid shelter rehabilitation project.

Salima is one of the beneficiaries of this project and NRC helped repairing her war-damaged modest 3-room house. The bombardment around the house had cracked walls and blown out glasses in windows and doors. Shrapnel had destroyed the water tank outside. With a grant of just over 1600 Euro Salima was able to employ a local handyman to make her house habitable in time for winter.

About one thousand families in the Nabatiyeh district have benefited from this project, and home owners have participated in the repair works as far as possible. A proper house gives families physical protection and a chance to lead their lives in dignity.

Continued efforts

“It is important that the humanitarian efforts and rebuilding in southern Lebanon continue”, said Backlund.

Many houses are still in a bad condition and need repairs. NRC assessments show that more than one third of the war damaged houses have leaky roofs. This made winter living conditions cold and damp, which had an adverse affect on people’s health. After repairing one thousand houses, NRC is now implementing a shelter waterproofing project for 1700 houses in villages around the coastal town of Tyre.

“The positive aspect is that the rebuilding process offers some work opportunities and thereby contributes to the local economy. Many beneficiaries are themselves preparing their roofs before the contractors arrive”, said NRC project coordinator Richard Evans.

A total of 13 500 persons are benefiting from these NRC projects and receiving assistance to repair their houses. The projects are funded by the Norwegian MFA and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO).

For more information, please contact:

Press adviser Siri Elverland. Mobile: +47 93 21 82 19

Norwegian Refugee Council: PO Box 6758 St. Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo | Phone.: +(47) 23 10 98 00 | Fax.: + (47) 23 10 98 01 | E-mail: nrc@nrc.no |
Visiting address: [Grensen 17, Oslo](#) | OrgNr. [977 538 319](#) Funded by [NORAD](#) | NRC©1996-2007 | [CMS: OXX Publisher](#) | Design: Uniform

