

As prepared

Talking Points of Mr. Jan Kubis, Special Coordinator for Lebanon

on Behalf of UNSCOL

International Support Group Meeting at the Invitation of H.E. President Aoun

Beirut, 6 April 2020

- Allow me to thank H.E. President Aoun for inviting the members of the ISG.
- Presentations provided in this meeting will help us understand the government's vision, strategies, and objectives but also gaps and challenges in its efforts to find a way out of unprecedented crises with deep negative implications on peoples' wellbeing and future, Lebanon's stability and security, if not addressed quickly in a timely, comprehensive, effective, and credible way.
- They will help us understand in which priority areas Lebanon needs increased mobilization of the necessary support and assistance to overcome this period of existential crisis now heavily compounded by the COVID-19 global pandemic.
- The ISG members expressed their position in the communique from the ISG Paris meeting on 11 December 2019 and subsequent statements.
- The COVID-19 outbreak represents an unprecedented challenge for the country as it compounds issues the country has already been struggling with prior to the health emergency and that prompted the people's protests that started on 17 October 2019. Among them are macro-economic vulnerabilities, lack of debt sustainability and liquidity, weak institution, public services, and systems, pervasive corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, deepest economic, social, and financial crisis in the recent history; steeply increasing unemployment, poverty, inequality, and emerging social tensions born of growing desperation.
- The United Nations welcomes the first steps taken by Lebanon so far to start addressing the crisis and its impact on the population. We further encourage in particular the efforts to ensure all population groups across the country can have access to testing and treatment through the network of hospitals designated for the response.
- The health response needs to be coherent and unified under the oversight of the Government of Lebanon and offer the same level of services to all patients, regardless of their legal status and nationality.
- In support of the government efforts, the UN is strengthening the engagement with communities, to provide evidence-based guidance about COVID-19 prevention,

mitigation and care, to continue delivering critical assistance and services to most vulnerable communities, including primary health care, protection, shelter and sanitation.

- The UN in Lebanon is preparing a COVID-19 funding appeal, to be issued this week, to support the national COVID-19 response. The appeal is divided into four priority areas: 1. Supporting the preparedness and response capacity of the Lebanese health system in coping with COVID-19 outbreak; 2. Strengthening the engagement and communication with communities, and support for good hygiene practice; 3. Prompted by the Syrian war and humanitarian crisis, delivering critical assistance and services to most vulnerable communities, as foreseen in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP); and 4. Expanding support to growing numbers of vulnerable Lebanese population groups not covered under the LCRP and in need of protection and humanitarian assistance due to the combined impact of previous socio-economic crisis and COVID-19.
- For the UN, the situation around Syrian but also Palestinian refugees remains a priority. UNHCR and UNRWA are working on specific plans to cater for population living in overcrowded locations, i.e. camps, collective shelters and informal tented settlements. This includes provision for dedicated isolation areas, which can also be repurposed to receive patients with mild symptoms. Expansion of existing hospital capacity is also planned for more severe cases.
- The UN with the WB and other international partners work closely with the government on sustainable social safety net solutions and on mobilizing support for the government in its efforts to mitigate existing and new vulnerabilities, including the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.
- The United Nations and partners are refocusing their work to best support the Government of Lebanon and the people of Lebanon in the current circumstances. Now is the time for collective and coordinated engagement.
- In conclusion, I would like to emphasize solidarity and commitment of the UN, of key members of the international community to continue supporting Lebanon and its people, its development, unity, security, and stability.

Note to Editors

The International Support Group has brought together the United Nations and the governments of China, France, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States, together with the European Union and the Arab League. It was launched in September 2013 by the UN Secretary-General with former President Michel Sleiman to help mobilize support and assistance for Lebanon's stability, sovereignty and state institutions and to specifically encourage assistance for the Lebanese Army, Syrian refugees in Lebanon and host communities and government programs and public services impacted by the Syrian crisis.