

**Presidency of the Council of Ministers**  
**Communication Unit**  
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**Q&As Issue # 1**

• **What governmental institutions are represented in the High Relief Commission?**

As stipulated in ministerial decision No 93/30, issued on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1993, the High Relief Commission is presided by the Prime Minister and made up of members in the persons of the Ministers of Defense, Health, Social Affairs, Interior, Finance, Public Works, Energy and Housing. The High Relief Commission's members also include the Director Generals of Social Affairs, Council of the South, and the Fund for the Displaced, and representatives from the ISF and the Lebanese Army.

• **How does it operate on a day-to-day basis?**

The High Relief Commission is managed by its Secretary General, General Yehya Raad. Its finances are controlled by Mr. Muhieddine Dandachli, a permanent staff member of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The High Relief Commission does not employ people. All those working for it are public servants working in various governmental administrations.

• **Are its accounts audited?**

The High Relief Commission's accounts are audited both internally and externally.

The internal auditor, appointed by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, is Mr. Khaled el Mir, who co-signs all spending orders issued.

The external auditors of the High Relief Commission are Sidani & Co. The auditing firm issues regular end-of-year reports.

• **How much money has been spent so far on relief?**

More than LL 32 Billion have been spent by the High Relief Commission to date (July 12-September 30, 2006). This amount is subject to extremely detailed book-keeping and accounting procedures. All expenditures are documented by category, item and unit. The financial controller archives all purchasing orders, payments issued and related invoices and is responsible for the reconciliation of accounts.

• **What has the money been spent on?**

The money has been spent on various sectors related to relief, ranging from food needs to transport of personnel & equipment, mattresses, blankets, packing material and childcare products among others. Food parcels and hot meals represent the largest portion of expenditures at LL 26 Billion (amounting to just over 80% of the total expenditure figure).

• **It has been said that some cheques were issued in the names of government representatives. Is that the case, and if so, why?**

As it became clear that the Israeli aggression's scope was seriously hampering relief efforts and destruction of roads and bridges was delaying the transport of assistance to the various affected regions, the Prime Minister declared a situation of emergency and issued payment advance orders, on the basis of a Cabinet Decision dated July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006, to various governmental representatives, by way of cheques written to their names.

Such a procedure has been practiced in previous situations when decentralization was adopted to facilitate relief efforts.

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- **How many people were issued such cheques?**

Beneficiaries of such advance payments were Secretary General of High Relief Commission, Mohafez of the North, Mohafez of the Bekaa, Mohafez of the South, Mohafez of Nabatyeh, Caimacam of Metn, Caimacam of Jbeil, Caimacam of Kesrouan, Caimacam of Chouf, Caimacam of Aley, the Lebanese Army, Director of Water for South Lebanon, Director of Water for Bekaa, and Minister of Health.

- **How is the spending of these amounts controlled?**

All advance payments were made through the High Relief Commission bank account. All beneficiaries are held responsible for presenting justifications and full documentation of the expenditures of the advanced amounts to the High Relief Commission financial controller.

- **What are the current prerogatives of the High Relief Commission?**

The High Relief Commission is currently pursuing some relief work in the form of food distribution, and focusing its efforts on the recovery phase. Recovery-related activities of the High Relief Commission include compensation & assistance to families of martyrs, the wounded, those whose houses have been totally or partially destroyed, as well as fishermen who have been badly hit by the pollution caused by the oil spill.

- **Is the government providing compensation to families whose homes were totally or partially destroyed by the Israeli aggression?**

Assistance amounting to USD 40,000 will be provided to families whose homes were completely destroyed in Southern Lebanon and other parts of Lebanon. Those whose homes were partially destroyed or lightly or severely damaged will be receiving financial assistance on a pro-rata basis.

For full details on the <b><u>government's evaluation and disbursement mechanisms</u></b> of assistance for damages to housing and non-housing units resulting from the Israeli aggression between July 12 and August 14, 2006, please visit <a href="http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb">www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb</a>
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- **Does this assistance scheme cover Beirut Southern suburbs?**

As the situation for Beirut Southern suburbs is somewhat different, due to the complexity of co-ownership, a mechanism is currently under study to assist those whose houses were totally or partially damaged in the suburbs. The mechanism is being developed by a committee made up of the PCM, the CDR, the Urban Planning Office, the Order of Engineers, the Cadastral Office, the Ministry for the Displaced, the Fund for the Displaced, representatives from the four affected municipalities (Borj el Brajneh, Haret Hreik, Chyah, Ghobairy) and representatives from the local political parties.

- **Who will be leading this process?**

The High Relief Commission will be leading the compensation efforts, in coordination with other governmental institutions including the Council of the South, the Ministry of the Displaced and the Fund for the Displaced, along with other expert governmental consultants.

- **Has the government started distributing this financial assistance?**

Damage assessment and physical survey are almost complete for all the affected areas. Citizens whose homes have been totally or partially destroyed will need to apply for assistance by providing the required documents to either of three governmental channels: the

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Council of the South, the Ministry for the Displaced or the Fund for the Displaced. Once they have submitted their declaration of damages and once the above-mentioned governmental institutions have verified the damage reports, assistance will be disbursed by the High Relief Commission according to a two-phase payment scheme. A detailed payment mechanism has been developed and was announced on 5/10/2006.

- **How many homes have been affected by the Israeli aggression?**

Early preliminary assessments undertaken by the government estimate that a total of more than 70,000 housing units have been affected. Severity factors range from totally destroyed (7500+ units), to a similar number of partially destroyed units, severely damaged (15,000+ units) and partially damaged (38,000+ units).

- **Has the government started working on removing the rubble resulting from the Israeli aggression?**

The Ministry of Public Works and Transport is currently at work in more than 75 locations and employing more than 1500 machinery units to deal with the task of removing the immense amount of rubble resulting from the Israeli aggression. Up to early October, 95% of the rubble in the suburbs and 50% of 1.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of rubble in the South had been removed.

- **The fishing community has been terribly affected by the oil spill. What has the government done to address their concerns?**

The High Relief Commission has distributed nearly USD 1,000,000 in compensation to over 4800 fishermen so far. Payments have been made to the order of the Fishermen Syndicates in the various affected areas.

Moreover, the United Arab Emirates have set up a joint special fund with the High Relief Commission to assist Ouzai's fishermen.

The Recovery & Reconstruction cell at the Presidency of Council of Ministers has also been coordinating a UNDP-funded "recovery of fishermen's livelihood project" amounting to USD 200,000

- **Some donor countries would like to dedicate their aid to specific affected sectors. How is the government planning to address that?**

The Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in collaboration with Banque du Liban, has set up various sub-accounts for the High Relief Commission. These accounts operate as joint accounts between the High Relief Commission and the donor country, and may be exclusively committed towards specific sectors, ex. High Relief Commission –United Arab Emirates for assistance to Ouzai's fishermen; High Relief Commission -Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development; High Relief Commission –Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Aid for School Fees... This mechanism has been developed to ensure transparency and optimal allocation of resources to the most affected communities and sectors.

- **Is the government providing compensation to the wounded and to families of people who were deceased because of the war?**

Yes, the government has announced its compensation scheme for assistance to those who were wounded during the war, and to the families of those who were deceased during the war. LL 15,000,000 will be paid by the High Relief Commission to those who were wounded, upon presentation of the required documents. Compensation to families of the deceased will amount to LL 20,000,000 for those above 10 years old, and LL 10,000,000 for those under 10 years old.

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- **When will the High Relief Commission start paying compensation?**

The High Relief Commission has started disbursement of assistance on Monday September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

- **What are the mechanisms adopted by the government regarding the financing of the reconstruction of destroyed bridges?**

The Presidency of the Council of Ministers has elaborated an adoption scheme to facilitate the adoption of the reconstruction process of destroyed bridges to donor countries, individuals or companies. To date, 45 out of 93 damaged bridges located on the international roads have found donors, who have shown satisfaction with the scheme proposed by the government. Under this adoption scheme, donors undertake the study, design and building processes, in coordination with the CDR and the Ministry of Works and Public Transport to safeguard the quality of design and construction and supervise technical specs.

- **What about the reconstruction of destroyed towns and villages?**

A similar adoption scheme has been elaborated by the Government to facilitate the adoption of the reconstruction process of destroyed towns and villages. To date, 95 out of 251 towns and villages have found donors.

The Government has announced its program for the reconstruction of towns and villages outside the Beirut Southern suburbs. ***For full details of the program, please visit [www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb](http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb)***

***To comment, please e-mail [aandraos@pcm.gov.lb](mailto:aandraos@pcm.gov.lb)***