
UNRWA Relief Convoy under Attack in Lebanon Refugee Camp

Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon, May 2007

Richard Cook, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon, is outraged by the attack on an UNRWA relief convoy that entered Nahr el-Bared camp north of Tripoli Tuesday.

"I'm extremely concerned about the humanitarian conditions and the welfare of those who are still in the camp and of those who have been displaced", Richard Cook said, adding that UNRWA will continue to press for a ceasefire that would avoid a further escalation of the situation.

Richard Cook made the comments as thousands of desperate Palestine refugees are fleeing the beleaguered camp in northern Lebanon. There are reports that many bodies of civilians have been found in the camp since the fighting broke out on Sunday.

The UNRWA convoy came under fire on Tuesday afternoon when it entered the camp, trying to take advantage of a negotiated ceasefire. UNRWA workers saw at least two civilians being killed and at least ten being injured when the convoy came under fire after thousands of camp inhabitants had gathered around the UNRWA trucks to receive food, medicine and water.

"It's a miracle that none of the UNRWA workers were hit," says Hoda el-Turk from UNRWA's Public Information Office in Lebanon who followed the convoy.

Richard Cook had no choice but to order the convoy to leave the camp. The first truck in the convoy had been hit, the engine of a tanker carrying water was also hit by fire. A pick-up truck was stuck behind the tanker. All these vehicles had to be left behind while the remaining five vehicles in the camp drove out to escape the shooting. Most of the medical supplies had been distributed.

Later on the same afternoon, an UNRWA pick-up truck managed to make three distribution rounds into the camp, delivering 5000 bags of bread.

UNRWA has established an emergency clinic in a mosque situated in a relatively safe area of the camp. UNRWA is now providing relief to the refugees fleeing Nahr al-Bared camp. Many of them are heading towards Beddawi Camp where relief and medical teams are receiving them in UNRWA schools.

The Lebanese government has opened the stadium in Tripoli for refugees from Nahr al-Bared camp. UNRWA is coordinating relief efforts there along with other aid agencies.

Nahr el-Bared camp housed more than 30,000 UNRWA registered refugees before fighting broke out. More than 8000 of them are listed as Special Hardship Cases.