

Children in Nahr al-Bared victims of Violence

Save the children's response work 2007

Nahr al-Bared Camp was established by the League of Red Cross Societies in 1949 to accommodate Palestinian refugees from the Lake Huleh area, north of Palestine. The camp is situated by the coastal road 16 km north of Tripoli. In 1950 UNRWA began providing services to the refugees in the camp. Nahr al-Bared was before the outbreak of violence in May 2007 characterised by its poor infrastructure and over-crowdedness with an estimated 31,023 refugees living in the camp.

Nahr al-Bared Camp before the conflict had:

- 31,023 registered refugees
- One agency health centre receiving on average 494 patients/day
- Ten UNRWA elementary/preparatory schools for 5,686 enrolled pupils in 2003/4
- One youth centre
- Two community run rehabilitation centres
- One kindergarten teaching French to 22 enrolled pupils in 2003/4



Fighting erupted in Nahr al-Bared on the 22nd of May 2007 after Lebanese

security forces pursued a band of Fatah al-Islam fighters that had robbed a bank in Tripoli.

The heavy fighting in the Nahr al-Bared camp, forced its Palestinian refugee residents to flee to the neighbouring camp of Badawi, situated in the hills 5 km north of Tripoli. Many civilians had to travel the 12 km distance from Nahr al-Bared to Badawi by foot, while others found means of transportations, including trucks to travel from camp to camp. It took a couple of weeks before all civilians could leave the camp. Those who stayed were threatened of being caught up in crossfire, shelling, and being targets of snipers both inside the camp, or while leaving. Protection risks included the lack of drinking-water, food, medicine, and curative care as dead bodies of human beings and animals littered the streets caused an increasing health hazard. The clashes in Nahr al-Bared represented Lebanon's bloodiest internal fighting since the Civil War.

"I left Nahr al-Bared 3 days ago after 10 days of heavy bombing...many of my neighbours who are old women and men are refusing to leave...they don't want to be forced out of their houses again...it reminds them of their forced displacement from Palestine...." – Samira Yousef, mother from Nahr al-Bared

Approximately 4,365 displaced families (24,000 persons: average size of family 6 persons – 4 children, or 8 persons – 6 children) from Nahr al-Bared sought refuge in Badawi, with the largest population being children under the age of 18. Thus the already overcrowded Badawi camp became even more crowded and was not capable of hosting and accommodating such a high influx of IDPs. Consequently 547 families, approximately 3,500 persons took shelter in 3 schools, with each classroom the size of 60 m² hosting more than one family at once (between 60 – 70 persons), while 3,791 families, approximately 26,500 persons, took refuge in homes of families and friends.

Badawi Camp

Established by UNRWA in 1955. The camp's major problems include poverty and unemployment. All shelters have indoor water supplies, however the camp's sewers flood frequently and sewage is discharged into the sea.

- 16,198 registered refugees
- One UNRWA health centre with an average of 254 patients/day
- Six UNRWA elementary/preparatory schools and one secondary schools for 3,468 enrolled pupils in 2003/4
- One community managed woman's program centre
- Community-based Rehabilitation Program for Disabled (CBR)

Over crowdedness led to a number of complications. Within school shelters communicable diseases posed an immense health risk as cases of TBC and skin diseases were reported and hygiene kits were delayed. A number of other problems were also noted as people suffered from lack of water, food, electricity shortages, and lack of privacy. Moreover, the population of Badawi that normally worked outside of the camp were no longer able to do so and earn an income due to the harassment by the Lebanese army security check-points and the discrimination from the neighbouring Lebanese population. Consequently, the stress on the population increased and resulted in more violence and abuse towards children from both the Beddawi and Nahr al-Bared camp. The children's living conditions deteriorated as they were no longer protected by their traditional surroundings; they were now living in a new environment, and for those children in Badawi the dynamics of the camp had changed and all children were exposed to great stress among surrounding adults.

IDPs from Nahr al-Bared

- *5,325 families (29,000 civilians) displaced from Nahr al-Bared camp
- *4,365 IDPs (24,000 persons) took shelter in Badawi camp
- *1,000 displaced from Nahr al-Bared took refuge in other areas around Lebanon
- Children under 18 account for larger portion of IDPs
- 4 Palestinian civilians killed, 550 injured as a result of the fighting, 80% of which women and children

**Figures according to UNRWA*

***Figures from Safad PRCs Hospital in Badawi*

"I was with my cousins watching TV when they began bombing over our heads...in that moment I felt like I would die...fighting erupted at the Lebanese army targeted Fatah al-Islam and they the army. We fled the camp, but I want to go back because that's my home! My brothers are still there, and I left behind all my things, like games, clothes, books, photos...."

Save the Children Immediate Response to Nahr al-Bared Conflict:

- Establishment of an Save the Children Emergency Field-Team
- On day two of the crisis: 24th of May, Save the Children Sweden provided immediate support to 5 existing Palestinian partner organizations with presence in both Beddawi and Nahr al-Bared for their psycho social intervention programs
- Supported 12 partners in the establishment of 11 Safe spaces with extensive psycho social programs supporting more than 15,000 children
- Establishment of a Child Protection Network (CPN) with 18 local CBOs, active participation also from UNRWA
- Coordinated the deliveries of non-food items (NFI) to children
- Provided capacity building to partners in psycho social and protection tools and methodologies in emergencies
- Involvement in all cluster meetings to advocate for children's wellbeing, safety and rights are respected. Cluster meetings included: NFI, Protection, Shelter, and Water & Sanitation (absence of education cluster)
- Weekly Situation Report updates
- Advocated for implementing the internationally sanctioned emergency response to apply a sector/cluster approach with protection integrated on field-level with presence of donors, agencies, NGOs, and community organizations
- Lobbied for applying Educational cluster coordination meetings
- Monitoring system identifying and responding to child abuse and separated children
- CPIE workshops in Beirut and Beddawi camp
- House to House surveys
- Field-visits
- Continuous updates of situation to media

Save the Children Sweden was amongst the first international humanitarian organizations to respond to the situation in Nahr al-Bared by conducting a field-visit and rapid assessment of the situation on the 22nd of May. An EST Child Protection Consultant from Save the Children Sweden immediately moved to Badawi in order to be able to continuously monitor, report, and coordinate activities, upholding the mandate of protecting children in emergencies. Save the Children Sweden responded to the displacement in the Badawi camp focusing mainly on protection and education by establishing an emergency Save the Children Sweden field-team. Furthermore, without delay, Save the Children Sweden established a community based Child Protection

Network (CPN), comprised of 18 CBOs and NGOs working in the Nahr al-Bared and Badawi camps. The main implementing partner NGOs in the emergency response of Save the Children Sweden and Alliance, that remain active in the recovery process, include: Developmental Action Without Borders (Nabaa), Right to Play, Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation

(GKCF), Women's Humanitarian Organization (WHO), Palestinian Children and Youth Institute (PCYT), and Children and Youth Centre (CYC).

A psychologist, 18 youth volunteers, and 11 peer educators were recruited by Save the Children Sweden and its partners whom immediately implemented Child Protective activities that included psycho-social support at 5 displacement schools, therapeutic interventions and a referral system to 3 psychologists for following-up cases of psychologically traumatized children. In close coordination with the CPN and local partners, Save the Children Sweden established 8 safe spaces and conducted a number of activities as part of the UNRWA educational summer activities to bring a sense of normalcy into the children's lives by establishing safe play spaces for them and through outdoor games, sport activities, drawing, painting, mobile cinema, story-telling, self-expression drama, and clown shows reaching more than 7,000 children.



Children from Nahr al-Bared and Badawi were involved in several additional activities that included the letter-boxes that were set up for *family receiving newborn baby-bed* children to share their feelings. Participatory animation activities that allowed children to express their feelings and living conditions also took place. Every day 172 children between the 3 and 18 years of age were exposed to these activities aimed at empowering them and providing psychological coping mechanisms. Save the Children Sweden also identified more than 15 children below 1 year old and provided them with new-born kits and baby-beds in partnership with other NGOs.

In coordination with the CPN, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, Save the Children Sweden has identified 15 minors imprisoned by the Lebanese army, the youngest 12 years old. In addition Save the Children Sweden volunteers identified 560 separated children (with a single parents, orphans, with parents living abroad, imprisoned parents, parents still in Nahr al-Bared camp). Moreover, 16 cases of sexual abuse amongst youth, leading to marriage, were also noted. A strong monitoring and reporting system by Save the Children Sweden volunteers, and the CPN animators was set in the camp to identify and respond to cases of abuse, child labour, children's conditions and needs, service deliveries, in addition to children suffering from severe psychosomatic symptoms that need referral to individual counselling. Indicators of the emergency's negative impact on children's well-being, developmental rights and needs include:

- Increased levels of stress and violence affecting children;
- Increased poverty due to income-generating sources becoming almost non-existent, affecting children;
- Decreased possibilities for adult-support (parents) to enable the to deal with children's well-being and psycho-social development;
- Disabled psychological development for children.

Most identified cases of abuse, encountered in IDP centres, were parents physically punishing their children. The Save the Children volunteers were trained on the *Safe You Safe Me* the child-friendly publication teaching children, and guardians, about child rights and how to stop violence against them.



IDPs from Nahr al-Bared reading the Safe You Safe Me Save the Children Publication in a safe-play area in Badawi

Quality education is another key issue Save the Children is working on by establishing a protective system meeting the children's needs, well-being, and rights in accordance with the CRC and protecting their safety in the shelters that included schools, and host families around Badawi. Save the Children Sweden lobbied for an urgent solution to the children in grades 9 to 12 that were presenting their final exams. Save the Children Sweden field-staff also identified three groups of children at high risk in need of remedial education-program, social, and life skills.

They included 1: school drop-outs whose remedial education programs planned by UNRWA were cancelled due to the fighting in Nahr al-Bared; 2: children between 15 - 18 years old at risk of being associated and involved with armed forces, groups, and early marriage; 3: children with disabilities in need of special education. Save the Children Sweden

held an exhibition of the displaced children's stories, poems, and drawings at the Badawi Camp, with the local community, UNRWA and the media in attendance.

In celebration of the end of Ramadan, and to mark Save the Children's Day of Action, Save the Children Sweden in partnership with the CPN organized a festival on the 14th of October called *"We are still playing!"* targeting 300 children from the Nahr al-Bared and Badawi camps. The activities that took place highlighted the problem of violence against children; however also had a positive element with giant exhibition in the streets of the camp, painting, games, and puppet shows.



Drawings by children expressing the trauma they went through when living in Nahr al Bared

Cessation of hostilities requires a new plan of action that addresses the arising needs of IDPs returning to their homes. 85% of Nahr al-Bared has been totally destroyed and presents a number of challenges. An immediate response includes removing dead bodies, cleaning rubble, and clearing the high number of UXOs that cover the area. Rebuilding the camp is estimated at 8.5 million USD. Despite the limited shelter, great destruction to homes, and lack of safety on the 10th of October 2007, displaced families began returning to Nahr al-Bared. UNRWA has been identifying plots of land for temporary shelter around the camps of Nahr al-Bared and Badawi, and is planning a 42 million USD appeal for the next 12-months to be used for continuing emergency relief activities as well as providing temporary shelters. The temporary shelters have now been constructed but lack a number of essential items that include sufficient windows and equipment for winter. Another appeal is being prepared regarding rebuilding Nahr al-Bared, estimated at 8.5 million USD. Some of the Lebanese villages in the area adjacent to the camp are complaining about reconstruction and affirm that they oppose any attempt to rebuild Nahr al-Bared where it was.

More than 1,500 families (approximately 7,000 children) have returned to date, despite damage to the camp and the protection risks. Families returning to their homes in Nahr al-Bared are trying to retrieve their belongings from unsafe areas, while children play in the rubble becoming victims of unexploded bombs that litter the camp. In the end of November, 2 teenagers were reported to have accidentally set-off an unexploded bomb injuring 5 bystanders while searching for scrap metal, as a means of income. 50% of the Nahr al-Bared population has lost their income due to the conflict; currently UNRWA and ILO are conducting a survey to examine the main needs and opportunities for income generation.



Helicopter view of Nahr al-Bared Camp

There is no access to water, sanitation, or electricity in Nahr al-Bared. People are suffering from isolation as well as the shock of living in a virtual wasteland. Media has been banned from entering the camp, making photographic documentation of the situation difficult.

There are ongoing reports however regarding arson, vandalism, looting, and burning of homes and properties inside the camp, in addition to anti-Palestinian graffiti and offensive messages covering the walls. In order to reduce the tensions between the Palestinian and neighbouring Lebanese community, Save the Children's local partner Nabaa conducted a joint activity with 500 children from both communities celebrating the end of Ramadan.

Directly upon the return of families to Nahr al-Bared, Save the Children Sweden and its partners helped families in clearing rubble from their homes, and began conducting activities in the camp that included psychosocial support for parents, and awareness raising activities for children concerning safety issues. Save the Children Sweden with its partners have identified 3 safe-spaces for children within Nahr al-Bared available to conduct psycho-social and educational activities for children. The CPN has conducted an assessment in Nahr al-Bared to map the children that have returned to the camp, and to discover the needs and priorities of the returnees. Children are expressing great anger concerning their destroyed homes, as one child said *"before I used to study and play with my friends, but now I only stay at home...I don't play, I don't go to school, and I'm afraid...there are a lot of bombs around so I'm afraid to play...."*

Results of a Participatory Rapid Assessment in Nahr al-Bared, conducted by Save the Children Sweden and the CPN shows that:

- Children feel unsafe and unprotected, while most parents feel are incapable of protecting their issues. Protection issues include UXOs around homes, falling buildings, open homes (no doors, windows) therefore lack of security, and no electricity.
- Women are feeling degraded by being thoroughly checked upon entering and existing the camp (although they are searched privately by women soldiers), while men feel humiliated by the treatment of the women. Adults are comparing these checkpoints to those in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Access to education is limited, as schools have not yet begun, students are having difficulties at checkpoints, and there is no transportation available to them.
- Out of 565 families surveyed, 414 have no income and there are no economic or employment opportunities within the camp.
- Families are in need of winter clothes, especially for newly born babies, and children under the age of 5.

After a 3-months delay schools finally began on the 8th of December 2007 in Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi. The opening of schools in Beddawi was postponed due to IDPs taking shelter in them, whereas in Nahr al-Bared it was due to the great damage to infrastructure. UNRWA has rented and erected prefabricated schools for the 9,000 students from Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi camps. The 1,200 students living in Nahr al-Bared are going to a rented school in the neighbouring Lebanese village.

Save the Children Sweden's field-team monitored the situation in schools through conducting focus groups with 200 children and visiting more than 100 homes in Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi during the 1st two weeks of December.

"We like school very much because we want to learn. But we are too many in the class room and four children are sitting on one desk! The teacher is hitting us..." – 7 year old boy from Nahr al-Bared

"I like to go to school but in our class we are 60 students, and there is only one desk for five children! We are just sitting and not learning. We are too many in the bus and the driver is hitting us with a stick" – 6 year old boy from Nahr al-Bared

Outcome of focus groups conducted

- Crowdedness in the classroom
 - 42-70 students in each class
 - 4-5 students sitting in one desk
 - The number of students are increasing each day
- Teachers changing daily
- No learning atmosphere
- The children have to travel far to reach schools
- Parents think that Bhannin school is not welcoming for Palestinian children
- Teachers being violent (psychical and verbal abuses), causing children to fear them and thus dislike going to school
- Families cannot afford food for children and school equipment

Living Situation in Palestinian Refugee Camps

In Lebanon, Palestinian refugee camps present significant challenges to the health and well-being of children and their families. The infant and maternal mortality rates are higher than in other camps in the Middle East.

Most Palestinian refugees can not legally work, trapping 60% of them in poverty. Those that have the required permits to work in Lebanon cannot receive social security benefits even though they must pay for them.

Prospects for receiving a basic education are less likely as Palestinian children are effectively excluded from Lebanese public schools. Although UNRWA is required to provide Palestinian children with elementary and preparatory education, approximately 60% of young adults between the ages of 19 and 29 have not completed basic education at least in part because of the poor learning environment in the camps.



