Lebanon – Beirut Port Explosions
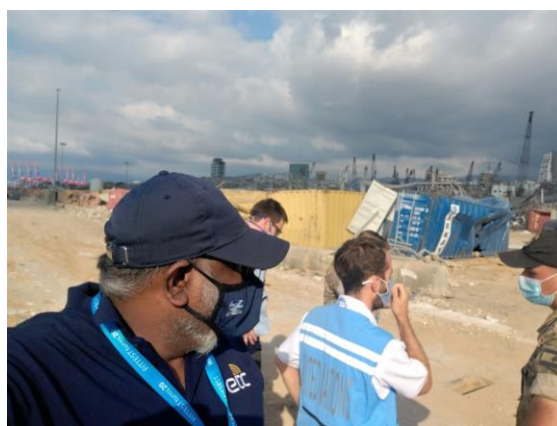
ETS Situation Report #1

Reporting period 10/08/2020 to 13/08/2020

The ETS is responding in Lebanon under a sector coordination approach, led by the Emergency Operation Cell (EOC). ETS Lebanon SitReps on the Beirut Port explosions will be distributed in line with the evolving situation on the ground.

Highlights

- Emergency telecommunications has been identified as a priority sector in the response to the Beirut Port explosions under the coordination structure of the Emergency Operation Cell (EOC).

- An Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) Coordinator arrived in Beirut on 11 August to coordinate with partners and national operators and to assess the communication needs of the response community and affected population.

- The ETS is submitting a proposal to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) flash appeal on 13 August outlining a budget of US$370,000 and setting out critical communications service priorities to support the response for an initial three month period.

The ETS Coordinator in Lebanon joins an UNDAC inter-agency assessment mission at the site of the explosions in the Port of Beirut on 11 August.

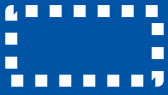*Photo: Prakash Muniandy/ETS*

Situation Overview

On 4 August, a warehouse at the Beirut Port containing large quantities of ammonium nitrate exploded. After an initial explosion, a subsequent blast caused widespread damage around the port area. Initial reports indicate approximately 160 people were killed and an additional 5,000 people have been injured. Severe structural damage was reported at the port and surrounding commercial and residential neighbourhoods, leaving up to 300,000 without homes. COVID-19 cases have reached record levels following the explosions. The Beirut Port explosions have exacerbated the worsening security situation and socio-economic vulnerability of the affected population, amid the ongoing economic crisis.

The ETC is a global network of organizations that work together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies.

ETS Response

- Under the coordination structure of the Emergency Operation Cell (EOC) in Lebanon, emergency telecommunications has been identified as a priority sector in the humanitarian response to the Beirut Port explosions. All sectors report to the EOC, which is accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) through the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).

- An Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) Coordinator deployed to Beirut on 11 August to coordinate with partners and national operators and to assess the communication needs of the response community and affected population.

- The ETS Coordinator in Lebanon joined an inter-agency United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) assessment mission on 11 August in the Port of Beirut. The initial assessment showed that telecommunications infrastructure and data connectivity have been wiped out in the port area worst-hit by the explosions. Voice connectivity at the site is still operational.

- The ETS has prepared inputs to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) flash appeal for submission on 13 August. The ETS flash appeal outlines a three-month response to provide critical communications services following the Beirut Port explosions, while identifying longer-term activities for recovery and impact mitigation. The proposed ETS budget is US$370,000 to fund activities including:

    - Temporary data connectivity at the site of the port explosions to support the response community and to assist rehabilitation of the port area until national services are re-established;

    - The provision of data packages and access to connectivity via Wi-Fi hotspots from available mobile network operators (MNOs) for the most vulnerable of the affected population to enable access to information and humanitarian assistance and allow contact with loved ones;

    - Strengthen security telecommunications networks to support the safety and security of the response community amid the escalating security situation.

- Several Global ETC partners have deployed international capacity on the ground in Beirut including NetHope and Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF). The ETS Coordinator has started to engage with them and other organizations that have a presence in country, such as the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The ETS is establishing coordination among local actors to identify capacity and to avoid duplication of efforts.

- ETS partner, WFP, has captured several high-resolution satellite images – from DigitalGlobe – showing infrastructural damage at the Port of Beirut caused by the two explosions. The images will support planning, recovery and rehabilitation efforts of the worst-affected area of the port. The following satellite image shows buildings destroyed (red), buildings impacted but still standing (white) and the radius of the data connectivity blackout at the Port of Beirut:

Site of port explosions

No connectivity services available within this range

Challenges

- Due to the volatile security situation, the ETS will engage closely with UNDSS and the HCT to access priority locations, such as the Port of Beirut.

- City power is unreliable and relies heavily on generators. There is a need to ensure ETS services such as security communications and data connectivity are able to operate 24/7 without relying on city power.

- The COVID-19 pandemic poses health concerns and restrictions to the humanitarian response. The ETS is ensuring its staff comply with restrictions and procedures in place – such as PCR testing and quarantine periods – to limit the spread of the virus. Any services for the affected population or humanitarian agencies shall be COVID-19 compliant.

- There is a need to engage with national authorities on rules and regulations for importing equipment to ensure the process is streamlined and to avoid delays.

Funding

- The ETS in Lebanon is submitting its proposal to the OCHA flash appeal on 13 August outlining a budget of US$370,000 to fund critical communication needs for the response community and affected population for an initial three month period.

Meetings

- The next Global ETS teleconference on the Beirut Port explosions in Lebanon will be held on **13 August 2020** at 1300 UTC.

Information

- All the information related to the ETS response in Lebanon can be found on the dedicated emergency page on the ETS website: https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/lebanon-beirut-port-explosions

- Partners that are responding in the affected areas or have relevant information on the Lebanon operation for the wider humanitarian community can share it by emailing Lebanon.ETS@wfp.org

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