

# **Humanitarian crisis looming in Lebanon – UN**

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**By Madeline Chambers**

LONDON (Reuters) - Escalating violence threatens to create a humanitarian crisis in Lebanon as the death toll rises and hundreds of thousands of people flee their homes, U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland said on Monday.

As Israel bombarded Lebanon for the sixth day and the Hizbollah guerrilla group fired more rockets into the Jewish state, civilians were bearing the brunt of the attacks, he said.

Israel's campaign has killed 179 people, all but 13 of them civilians, and wounded more than 500. It has also destroyed much of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure. Twenty-four Israelis have been killed in the fighting, including 12 civilians hit in rocket attacks.

"It is already a 'protection of civilians crisis'. We hear and see a population which feels trapped as they are subject to indiscriminate attacks," Egeland told Reuters.

He called for an immediate cease-fire from both sides.

He said there were reports of tens or hundreds of thousands of displaced people. While many were sheltering in schools, thousands more were trying to escape to neighbouring Syria but were stopped by blocked or destroyed roads.

Egeland said there were also fears about the effects of energy cuts and the destruction of infrastructure on water, sewage and health. Hospitals were working but fuel was a problem and ambulances were unable to reach people in need of life-saving treatment.

Egeland said it was "heartbreaking" that Lebanon's infrastructure was being destroyed just as reconstruction work had ended after years of civil war.

"They seem to be going full speed towards the abyss. It seems political and military leaders have a mandate for more revenge."

The United Nations, seeking to evacuate some of its 400 staff plus dependents from Lebanon in the coming days, is trying to send in emergency teams.

Egeland said as many U.N. workers as possible would stay and the world body may soon appeal to the international community for funds.

But he stressed: "It is not possible for the U.N. and others to escort large numbers of people in this kind of situation. We can maybe put a plaster on it but both sides need to stop inflicting the wounds."

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