Lebanon: record refugees, resources at risk – Italy's contribution to stability and security

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According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Antonio Guterres, the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has surpassed the one million mark. These in addition to the over one and a half million living in Syria's neighbouring countries and the approximately 6.5 million internally displaced persons. "A disastrous record", the Commissioner added, "aggravated by the fact that resources are fast drying up and the community that hosts them is at the breaking point". Lebanon — located in a region filled with tension resulting from the continuing Syrian crisis, and where Italy maintains a contingent within and command of the UNIFIL military mission — thus becomes the country with the highest number of refugees in the world in comparison with its own slightly more than 4 million inhabitants.

"Eroding peace and security"

The arrival in Lebanon of this mass of persons, who have lost nearly everything, risks "eroding the peace and security of this fragile society and of the entire region", the High Commissioner asserted. In the first place there is its impact on the infrastructure and services, such as water, electricity, schools and healthcare, in a country where these are already in scarce supply.

Italy supports strengthening national armed forces

Meeting in March at the foreign ministry in Rome with her Lebanese colleague Gebran Bassil, Minister Federaica Mogherini underscored the role of Italy in common efforts with other international partners to strengthen the Lebanese armed forces, for the purposes of stabilising a country that occupies a strategic position in the Middle East, and is surrounded by numerous and serious conflicts. Before the start of the summer, an international conference will be held in Rome in order to outline a plan for support for the Lebanese armed forces. A technical meeting in preparation for that conference will be held in April.

Aid from the Italian Cooperation

The World Bank has calculated Lebanon's financial losses in 2013 at 2.5 million USD. Various UN agencies have appealed to the international community for financial aid amounting to 1.89 billion USD for 2014. The Italian Cooperation has an established presence

there and is one of the country’s foremost partners. Italy is second among European donors, after France, with over 60 programmes under way. Intervention takes place in a range of sectors, and Italy is the main bilateral donor to those concerning the environment and local development; in healthcare and social programmes particular attention is focused on the most vulnerable segments and Palestinian refugees; support also goes to rural development and religious and cultural tourism.

A model for others

Within the framework of the 2013 Missions Decree “Syria and Neighbouring Countries”, a portion of resources was earmarked for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon in the sectors of schools, healthcare and vocational training, through existing bilateral intervention instruments, as well as through multilateral channels (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNWRA and UNDP). In line with the principles of “Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative” (GHD) in the area of civil and military coordination, the example of Lebanon is considered a model for other situations where military and civilian cooperation forces are working contemporaneously.

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2014/04/20140407_libanorifug/