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The Boston Globe

Groups raise aid for Lebanon's Red Cross

After cease-fire, need for relief is great, they say

By Lauren Johnson, Globe Correspondent | August 20, 2006

Dozens of Lebanese flags, illuminated by gas lamps in Copley Square and the budlike flames of tea candles, waved at passing cars on Dartmouth Street.

It was Aug. 11, and Loai Naamani, president of the Lebanese club@MIT, had organized demonstrators from such groups as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of Massachusetts and the Network of Arab-American Professionals in Boston. In front of the Boston Public Library, they decried Israel's response to the Hezbollah attacks, and sold T-shirts to fund the Lebanese Red Cross.

Just after sundown, Naamani took a phone call, listening as he watched the demonstrators in their newly purchased ``Deeply Rooted in Lebanon'' T-shirts.

The UN had just called for a cease-fire, he heard.

Though daily air strikes have since halted and the Lebanese who hid in mountain refuges are returning to what remains of their cities, a collaboration is underway in Boston to bring assistance to the country among a cross-section of groups, including Jewish Voice for Peace.

Alice Rothchild of Brookline, cochairwoman of the Boston chapter of Jewish Voice, said the behavior of Israel's government has endangered Israel and the Lebanese.

``It didn't get the soldiers back, and it created a humanitarian disaster," she said. ``It created more Lebanese that are sympathetic to Hezbollah and didn't accomplish improving the safety of Israel.

``It's important to speak out," Rothchild said. ``Many Jews feel horrified by what's going on, out of concern for Arab countries and the humanitarian aspect."

Even if the cease-fire holds, the situation in Lebanon is difficult, said Caline Jarudi, executive director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of Massachusetts.

``We're going to redirect our message now, with the cease-fire, but we don't want the momentum to be lost because of it," said Jarudi, who is Lebanese. ``We need to help our hospitals, schools, and the hundreds of thousands without homes."

Support for relief efforts is being organized by Justice for Lebanon, a

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collaborative effort by Boston-based Middle Eastern interest groups and 10 other organizations.

A concert in July raised \$35,000, according to Naamani, and T-shirt sales at four demonstrations raised more than \$40,000. Proceeds are handled by MIT and then given to the Red Cross, he said.

``Justice for Lebanon is not only Lebanese or only for people at MIT," Naamani said. ``This is for anyone who cares."

Though Justice for Lebanon coordinators said their demonstrations were not meant to point fingers at Israeli civilians or Israelis living in Boston, some local Israelis said they were offended by the chants and signs in Copley Square .

``There's a saying that if Hezbollah put down their weapons, there'd be no war," said Alex Iglecia, a Boston resident with aunts and cousins living in Israel. ``If Israel put down it's weapons, there'd be no Israel."

Naamani said fund-raising will continue, with a goal of \$1 million.

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