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## UN prepares for effects of Iraq war

**PM** - Wednesday, January 8, 2003 18:00

TANYA NOLAN: As the United States and its allies continue the build-up for a possible war against Iraq, the United Nations is making its own preparations for any humanitarian fall-out.

A confidential UN document predicts that up to half a million Iraqis will require medical treatment for serious injuries in the early stages of a military strike.

The UN has confirmed the authenticity of the report, posted on a UK-based website

UN agencies say their contingency plans are subject to change, but UN planners predict that the devastation inflicted on the Iraqi population "would undoubtedly be great."

They believe up to five million people would need rapid food aid once an attack begins.

At the same time, Arab activists in the Middle East are urging their leaders to try and persuade Saddam Hussein to go into exile to prevent a war.

Rafael Epstein reports.

RAFAEL EPSTEIN: The 12-page document is headed "Strictly Confidential," and UN officials have confirmed the documents existence and the fact their humanitarian agencies are preparing to

help Iraq's 26 million people, whether or not military action is explicitly sanctioned by the Security Council.

Obtained by an anti-war group in Britain, the document shows officials believe 100,000 Iraqis will be injured as a direct result of combat, and a further 400,000 would be wounded indirectly from the devastation of war. There are no casualty figures.

The agencies expect an initial aerial bombardment to be followed by a large-scale and protracted ground offensive. The report says the result and devastation would undoubtedly be great.

Arab activists in Lebanon and Egypt are trying to avoid such an outcome, publicly calling on Arab governments to persuade Saddam Hussein to resign.

SHIBLY MALLAT: There are two ideas in the call, creating an atmosphere for his resignation and two, the stationing of human rights monitors, either from the UN or from the Arab League, across Iraq to ensure that the transition is one that is peaceful.

RAFAEL EPSTEIN: Lebanese lawyer, Shibly Mallat, is a Professor of Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and he was speaking on American radio. He's previously tried to prosecute Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon in a Belgian court for crimes against humanity.

Arab officials have told British newspapers they want a chance to try and broker peace if efforts through the UN fail. The lawyers and journalists in Lebanon and Egypt want their leaders to publicly call for Hussein to go into exile, possibly in Russia.

SHIBLY MALLAT: Part of the reasons why we have issued that appeal is because there is no Arab voice, partly because Arab governments are scared of Mr Hussein and they shouldn't be, and partly because the legitimacy unfortunately is very weak, so it would be difficult for them to call for change.

RAFAEL EPSTEIN: The UN's humanitarian report assumes significant damage to Iraq's already decrepit infrastructure. It predicts one million refugees will flee the country, another two million will leave their homes, and it warns of the outbreak of disease in epidemic, if not pandemic, proportions.

The country's crippled economy means most Iraqis are almost totally reliant on their Government for daily supplies, including food. They'll be an immediate need to feed 5.4 million people, health supplies will be needed for 1.2 million people, and water treatment equipment could be needed for five million people.

The report says, based on experience in Afghanistan, the role of the US military in the direct delivery of aid is likely to be more negative than positive.

TANYA NOLAN: Rafael Epstein with that report.

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