

UPDATE ON THE SYRIAN CRISIS

by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace

Context

Far from subsiding, the crisis is continuing instead of getting bogged down. The numbers, moreover, are staggering:

In Syria, 13.5 million people are in need of emergency humanitarian aid, 6.5 million are displaced across the country and more than 4.2 million people have found refuge, chiefly in neighbouring countries, but also in Europe where more than 500,000 people have fled. To date, the conflict has left in its wake more than 250,000 dead and more than a million casualties.

Behind those figures, there are people living in unimaginable living conditions for this region of the world. In Aleppo, for example, water and electricity have been cut for about two weeks out of every month since the beginning of 2015. During the summer of 2015, when the mercury was hitting 40 degrees, Aleppinos were deprived of drinking water for three consecutive weeks; this situation was due to the fact that the water treatment plant is in the rebel zone while the electric plant used to power the pumps is in regime-controlled territory. The war for territory and control of resources is thus at the heart of the conflict.

The recent Russian military intervention in support of the authorities in Damascus has also further polarized the conflict. The various rebel components would have ceased to confront one another and would have united against the common enemy and would also benefit from new materials. They would therefore not lose ground and would continue instead to advance, as evidenced by the recent fighting around Aleppo and Damascus.

According to Father Nawras Sammour, S.J., director of JRS Syria [Jesuit Refugee Services Syria], *the Syrians on their own will not be able to solve this problem. Peace can only be achieved on a regional level and on an international level. No Syrian citizen can solve the current situation. The people are exhausted. The conflict is beyond the resolution capabilities of Syria.*

Main actions of Development and Peace

In this context, Development and Peace is managing to maintain action that is essential to the survival of hundreds of thousands of people in Syria and in neighbouring countries.

1. Emergency and rehabilitation

– Food distribution

- In Syria, we have a program to distribute food baskets that will enable 6,000 households (30,000 people) to be served monthly until the end of March 2016.

– *Housing and supply of essential goods*

- In Syria, 28,356 people are receiving blankets and heating materials to cope with winter, in addition to hygiene kits for women and children.
- In Jordan, 700 refugees with particularly vulnerable health issues have received grants enabling them to have access to adequate and secure housing.

– *Medical assistance*

- In Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, we continue to provide front- and second-line services to displaced persons, refugees and host communities. Mobile clinics also enable vulnerable people living far from the major centres to be reached. These programs will end in summer 2016.

2. Economic reconstruction, strengthening social and community fabric

– *Educational programs*

- In Syria, we are supporting schools that enable more than 3,000 children to receive lessons and psychosocial support.

– *Restarting communities' productive capacities*

- In Syria, two organizations are working to promote the empowerment of local communities, especially women, through economic activities. This support for producers is enabling people to regain their dignity and break the cycle of assistance.
- In the Idlib Governorate, more than 1,000 farmers are receiving monetary assistance to restart the production of essential foodstuffs for the population.
- In Eastern Ghouta, a region under siege located in the suburbs of Damascus and which was considered a granary for Syria, 10,000 kg of fresh vegetables are prepared, packaged and stored for distribution to the 200 poorest families (12,000 people) to help them face the winter.

3. Peacebuilding

- This year, we started working with youth organizations in Syria which have bet on Syria and are staying in the country to participate in its reconstruction. Still emerging, the initiatives are aimed at addressing humanitarian needs while integrating concepts of conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue.

Perspectives

The prophetic character of the Church is in small gestures and small initiatives. People of good will do many things. Many communities and organizations, other than JRS, provide the most vulnerable with basic commodities and food. Young religious and lay people are engaged in serving others. Since the beginning of the war, we have witnessed the birth of small groups and initiatives. Today, the difficulty of the situation means that these initiatives are less numerous, but there are always some.

Let us do everything in our power so that Syria might renew itself, relying on its own history, and so that it might be welcoming to all, like it has always been. I hope that the new Syria will reveal itself in its beauty as a bridge between East and West, multicultural and multi-religious, as it was before the war.

Father Nawras Sammour, S.J., Director of JRS Syria

The Syrian conflict is now in its fifth year. What Syrian men and women have endured since 2011 is dramatic. Civilians continue to be the main targets of the conflict, suffering sexual violence, disappearances and forced displacements, indoctrination of children to make them soldiers, summary executions and deliberate bombardments of civilian targets. With the deteriorating economic situation and the worsening humanitarian crisis, displaced Syrians are increasingly depending on foreigners to meet their needs. Our support, our solidarity has never been more essential.

December 2015