



Universal
Children's
20 Nov 2012 DAY

Raising awareness about displaced children



There are over forty million refugee and displaced people around the world and many of them are children.

As the world celebrates Universal Children's Day on 20th November, Islamic Relief is marking the occasion by highlighting the stories and struggles of just some of the millions of children who are trying everyday to survive their ordeals.

Here are some of their experiences:



The story of Maania

Islamic Relief's Muhammad Haseeb Khalid reports from Pakistan. Here is the story of nine-year-old Maania:



The tragedy, agony and plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs – people that have been displaced from their homes) within Pakistan has unfolded over the past few years in Pakistan and every individual who has suffered due to conflict tells

heart-wrenching stories of irreparable loss. The loss is neither of an individual nor of an area but, rather, it is about the future of the country as it is children that are suffering the most.

Since January this year, more than 100,000 people have been displaced inside Pakistan - mainly from the Khyber Agency in the country's north west - as a result of what UNHCR termed a 'recent increase in the intensity of fighting.' The Khyber Agency area has suffered from years of conflict and in 2004 over two million people were displaced.

Displacement not only affects lives in the short term; it also can have a long-term impact on the future of any children affected. A large number of IDP children, for example, cannot continue with their studies - which affects their life chances significantly.

If you visit an IDP camp or displaced families living off-camp, each individual has a unique story to tell. Nine year-old Maania is a displaced child from Bara, Khyber Agency, and a sufferer of thalassemia.

Maania and her grandfather talked to us while visiting a small health clinic run by Islamic Relief in Jalojai, District Nowshera. She was sitting with her grandfather, Malik Mir Akbar, in a waiting area allocated for the IDPs coming in to receive health serves – and he told us a story of anguish.

We belong to Bara, Khyber Agency, and my family had to leave our home due to ongoing conflict and a war-like situation in our village. Many of the houses have been demolished and we do not

know when the situation of our area will be normal. It's been almost eight months we are living with a host family. They are our relatives and we feel we don't have as the problems that other IDP families have to face with."

But still I feel we are living in dehumanizing living conditions because of a lack of basic needs and social neglect. I feel so bad that we are a burden on the family who are hosting us but we don't have another option. My son, Abdul Akber (Father of Maania), is a labourer in Karachi and is somehow managing the burden of the host family" said Malik.



Speaking about Maania, he said that she suffers from thalassemia and had to have blood transfusions every four or five months to keep her alive.

Maania, herself, recalled memories of her home in Bara. "I miss my friends with whom I used to play in the courtyard. My five brothers and two sisters were school-going but I couldn't go because my parent's didn't allow me to go to school due to my illness. Now, none of my sisters and brothers go to school because we are living in our relatives' house and I feel bad for my siblings because they are out of school."

When asked what she most wants back in her life, Maania replied in her native Pashto language saying, "I want to see my siblings start going to school again."

Displaced in Myanmar

Islamic Relief's Umair Hassan is on the ground in Myanmar working with internally displaced families. Here is the story of 16-year-old Abdul Razzaq:

On 8 June, inter-communal violence between the Buddhist majority and Muslim minority in the



Rakhine state increased dramatically. Tensions still remain high and curfews have been imposed by the Myanmar government to enforce separation of Muslims and Buddhists. This has had a major effect on both populations in relation to livelihoods, access to health, food and sanitation.

One teenager affected by the conflict is 16-year-old Abdul Razzaq who had to flee his home with his parents and nine siblings. Abdul Razzaq told Islamic Relief:

“There was a lot of violence in our area and people told us leave. My family and I fled to a safer location but we were then placed in a tent in the Say Tar Mai Gyi camp where there are people like us who have also had to leave their homes.

We don't like the camp. It is too hot to sleep in the tent and there is nothing to do. All ten of us share one tent. There is no schedule, we just sit around. My parents won't let us venture far away as it is not safe.”

After hearing her brother talk about the situation, Abdul Razzaq's 6-year-old sister, Taslima, jumped in and told Islamic Relief:



“I'm very sad. I miss my home and daily routine. I miss waking up early and going to Madrassah and studying with my friends. Here, I have to wake up early to fetch firewood, which I do not enjoy. I had to leave all my clothes at home so I have no choice but to wear one dress for several days. I miss eating fish and vegetables. We receive food here but it is only rice, red beans and oil.”

The family also complained about skin diseases and the bad smell coming from the nearby latrines which is not allowing them to sleep at night.

“I just want to go home, Taslima said, “I just want to return to my normal life as a kid.”

A day with Syrian refugees

Islamic Relief's Hatem Shurrab provides an account of his travels to Jordan to help Syrian refugees:



It is heartbreaking to read and hear a story of any refugee. It is even more heartbreaking to meet and hear their stories face-to-face.

During my visit to Jordan to assist Syrian refugees, I met hundreds of injured people, displaced families, orphaned children and desperate mothers.

Each had a horrific story to tell and each child I met looked at me with great sadness and despair.

How a bullet can change a life

We started in Amman and drove two hours to Al Ramtha City in northern Jordan where Qasim, from Islamic Relief Jordan, led us to a family in a small house in the Turra. We met 24-year-old Abdulsalam who was targeted in the violence in Syria. He told us that he was standing in front of his home in Aleppo when unknown gunmen drove in front of his house and started shooting at him. A bullet went straight into his backbone leaving him partially paralysed. Doctors are afraid to take the bullet out because it might cause total paralysis.

Qasim explained that he used to be a builder. Since his injury seven months ago he has been stuck in bed all day.

Nine-year-old Rawan saw dead bodies



We then walked to another house and visited an extremely poor Syrian family. Anas lives with his wife and two children in a tiny house built only for two people. Anas is able to afford rent through one of Islamic Relief's projects which provides rent assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Anas's daughter, 9-year-old, Rawan, told us of the dead bodies she saw during her three hour walk to Jordan. "It was tiresome and difficult. We were afraid gunshots would hit us. I was very thirsty."

Rawan's sister, Inas, suffers from heart problems and needs regular medication to stay alive. Despite this, she smiled at us, very optimistic of the prospect of returning to Syria.

Their mother is worried about her daughters' wellbeing and future. With her eyes full of tears, she said, "We had no choice but to escape." She described seeing dead bodies were on the ground in front of her house for days. Her daughters haven't been to school for almost two years.

Zaatari Camp



We then made our way to the Zaatari Camp. Located just about an hour from the border area to Al Mafraq City, the camp currently hosts over 30, 000 Syrian refugees with more flooding in on a daily basis.

While walking through the camp, an old woman, Khadija, stopped me.

"Have you heard anything about returning home?" she asked her eyes full of hope. I stayed silent for a few seconds unsure of how to respond. Khadija, like thousands of other Syrian families, are all dreaming and hoping of the day where they can return safely to their homes. She told me about her life before the violence started: "We had a decent calm life, but we had to flee and now we are refugees with no home and nowhere to go."

Khadija's grandchild, Zahraa stood silently at her grandmother's side. Khadija told me that Zahraa's father left home one day and never returned. They have no information or contact with him and do not even know if he is alive.

We met hundreds of other families who did not know the fate of their fathers, siblings, friends and other relatives inside Syria.

Despite sadness, there is some hope



After Zaatari camp, we went on to visit the specialised Hospital in Amman, where Islamic Relief is helping to provide medical aid to injured Syrians. I met Ahmed, who is recovering from surgery which Islamic Relief has helped to fund. Ahmed's home was attacked and he suffered bullet wounds. He is now recovering in the hospital and should be able to leave in a few weeks.

Our final visit was to the distribution centre in Al Ramtha where I gave mother-of-five, a hygiene kit and some food to last a family around one month.

Maryam described the security that this food provides. “When my husband was killed in Syria, I had no idea what to do. I have five children to support. I struggled for months to provide food on a daily basis. Alhumdillah, here we are receiving help thanks to the kindness of people. May Allah reward them all.”

After sunset, we returned back to Amman. On the journey back, I couldn't stop thinking about the children who have had to witness killings and wake up to dead bodies strewn across their homes. These children have been robbed of their childhood. The hundreds of widows who have been made the breadwinners of their families also kept crossing mind. What will they do to provide food for their children? What about school? How will the children receive education?



Despite what I have witnessed, I am still hopeful that relief will soon come for the people of Syria. With the continued support of donors, Islamic Relief will keep on providing emergency aid and long-term support to the people of Syria until they are able and empowered to stand on their own.

Please support Islamic Relief in helping the millions of displaced children across the world