

# Crisis in Syria

**GIVING HOPE  
THROUGH SOLIDARITY**

**2011-2015**



CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR

**Development  
and Peace**

# A WAR WITH NO END IN SIGHT

It has been four years since Syria fell into a brutal conflict that shows no sign of ending. What many believed would be a short-lived struggle has turned into the largest refugee crisis in the world, and one of the worst humanitarian emergencies today.

The conflict in Syria has its roots in the events of the Arab Spring of 2011, when various groups in the region mobilized to challenge longstanding dictatorships in their respective countries, and to call for democratic reforms and participative electoral systems.

In Syria, the Arab Spring was led mainly by youth who were contesting the numerous political and economic inequalities in the country. Calls for the resignation of President Bashar Al-Assad, whose family has been in power since 1971, were met with strong opposition. The president and his regime used every means at their disposal to repress protesters: military force, arrests, torture, massacres and placing entire cities under siege.

In March 2011, the situation quickly deteriorated into a civil war between government forces and the opposition, who although of various interests and groups, had united to contest the Assad regime.

The opposition, however, became increasingly divided towards the end of 2012, and today, are at times as much in conflict with one another, as with the government forces. Any hopes for peace were further shattered by the arrival of an armed group calling itself the Islamic State (ISIS), that is seeking control of the entire region with brutal force. Today, Syria is divided into government-, opposition-, Kurdish- and ISIS-controlled areas, and heavy fighting continues in several parts of the country.

In response to the takeover by ISIS of the majority of the northern parts of Syria, and 40% of neighbouring Iraq, the international community has launched aerial strikes in both countries. Initial reports coming out of these zones indicated that civilians were being impacted, but today, difficulties in receiving information have made it almost unknown as to how the population is coping.

## Devastating repercussions

Caught in the crossfire, suspected of allegiances, persecuted for religious beliefs or ethnic identity, nearly all live in fear in Syria. The mass movement of populations, as much within Syria as to neighbouring countries, is having very serious consequences for the entire region, both economically and politically, and in terms of security. The people living through this crisis have lost everything – loved ones, their home, their savings – and they can no longer even guarantee their own survival or that of their families.

The destruction of infrastructure has disrupted services such as water and electricity, and has placed enormous pressure on social and health services. There is a lack of goods coming into the country and the cost of living has skyrocketed. People are facing psychological distress as they confront combat, displacement, insecurity and basic survival on a daily basis.

Host countries are overwhelmed by the sheer number of refugees crossing their borders and tensions are rising over the increased scarcity of resources. These countries must now also cope with an influx of Iraqi refugees fleeing incursions by ISIS.

Harsh winter conditions over the last two years have added to the precarious living conditions of refugees, who do not have the necessary shelter and clothing to be shielded from the cold.

Providing humanitarian aid within this context is challenging, but in the face of this suffering, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has an imperative to act. Since 2012, we have been responding to the crisis and calling on Canadians to show their solidarity.



“My two cousins were killed in a bombing of their houses. We were running away from our homes but our cousins didn’t make it. We left in darkness at night. My family went to Turkey but I came with my husband and children to Lebanon.”

**Shaha Ibrahim** was three months pregnant when she walked to Lebanon with her husband and their young daughter to escape bombing in their village. It took them a month to reach Lebanon, where they now live in a shelter made of scrap metal.

Photo credit: Danny Lawson/PA Wire

# THE GROWING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SYRIA

An especially harsh winter has added to the suffering of refugees.



**MARCH 2012**

1 year later

**MARCH 2015**

4 years later

Turkey



Refugees  
16,500  
1.6 million

Syria



Deaths  
7,500  
220,000



Total number of Syrian refugees  
40,000  
3.75 million



In need of humanitarian assistance  
2.5 million  
12.2 million



Displaced internally  
1.2 million  
7.6 million

Lebanon



Refugees  
8,300  
1.2 million

Jordan



Refugees  
5,000  
623,000

# DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE'S RESPONSE

## Solidarity in action: Responding to the needs of the most vulnerable

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has been working in solidarity with the people of the Middle East since the organization was founded in 1967, particularly with the region's Christian communities. The organization has supported the most vulnerable in times of crisis, notably during the 2003 Iraq War and the 2009 Gaza blockade.

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has also developed programming to support local groups striving to build peace, resolve conflicts and strengthen citizen participation and democracy.

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE first responded to the crisis in Syria in the autumn of 2012 by contributing \$50,000 to the relief efforts of Caritas Lebanon. By the spring of 2013, as the situation continued to deteriorate and needs continued to increase, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE felt compelled to launch an appeal in collaboration with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to raise funds to support Syrians trapped in the calamity of war.

In addition to contributions of \$2.8 million from parishes, dioceses, schools, religious communities

and Canadians at-large, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has also received \$11.3 million in funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) and \$932,000 from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB).

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is working with local partner organizations in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable affected by this crisis. As local organizations, these partners have bonds of trust with the communities they work with, allowing them to reach those who are most in need of aid.

Dignity is at the heart of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE'S response. It is an ongoing endeavour that relies on the solidarity of Canadians and the courage and resilience of our partners. Together, we are offering one of the small glimmers of hope in this enduring crisis.

## MONEY RAISED: \$15 MILLION



People reached:  
80,000 families



"Peace must be looked for and built together through small actions every day."

Pope Francis

Photo credit: Caritas Turkey

## Syria

### AMOUNT COMMITTED: \$3,727,200



People reached:  
135,000

### Working with Jesuit Refugee Service: Peacebuilding at the heart of activities

Working in Syria is no easy feat. Chaos has become the norm and rocket attacks can occur at any moment. More than half of children do not attend school, and there has been massive destruction of infrastructure, with hospitals and health clinics being particularly hard hit. In addition, few aid organizations can actually operate in the country, placing heavy burdens on those that can.

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE'S principal partner in Syria, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), manages to reach thousands of people despite these circumstances, and even as their own staff are directly affected

by the war. JRS is providing help with lodging, educational activities for children, medication for chronic diseases, hospital access, care kits for infants, and household kits containing clothes, bed linens, kitchen supplies, and hygiene kits.

JRS, whose mission is to "accompany, serve and advocate" for refugees, works with those most in need without distinction. As such, through all its activities, it seeks to bring people closer together and break down the religious and ethnic barriers that are now pulling people apart. A meal at a soup kitchen can turn into a communal moment, or an activity for children can become an informal opportunity for parents of various backgrounds to chat over coffee.

As much as the services themselves are essential, it is the way in which they are provided that makes a difference. "We don't just give handouts, we walk alongside the people," says Fr. Nawras Sammour, JRS Country Director for Syria. The hundreds of employees and volunteers of JRS are Syrians helping their fellow Syrians – a promising sign on the path towards peace.

Other partners: **Caritas Syria:** Housing subsidies; distribution of winterization items; distribution of clothing, blankets, fuel for cooking and other household items. / **Menapolis:** Construction of a bakery to create jobs and help with food shortages; the distribution of food baskets. / **Caritas Austria:** Distribution of food baskets, childcare kits, blankets, mattresses and heaters; housing subsidies; medical care. / **CFGB with JRS:** Distribution of food aid.

Puppet shows at the Al Moukhales Centre in Homs help children express their emotions, learn new concepts and cope with the violence surrounding them.

Photo credit: Tomy Kilahji/Jesuit Refugee Service



# Lebanon

AMOUNT COMMITTED:

**\$5,707,000**



People reached:  
**212,000**

## Working with Caritas Lebanon: Life-saving medical aid

In Lebanon, the majority of refugees are living in urban areas, without the direct assistance that is provided in refugee camps. Living in crowded conditions and with little access to services, these refugees are struggling to survive in their new circumstances. Most have left all their belongings behind, and have survived an arduous journey to escape the risk of death. DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE and Caritas Lebanon have concentrated their efforts on reaching refugees living in urban areas.

One of the biggest concerns is their health. Many refugees arrive with chronic conditions that have

not been treated, or new illnesses that have developed from the harsh conditions that they have been exposed to.

To respond to this need, Caritas Lebanon and DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, with funding from DFATD, are operating 10 primary care centres and nine mobile medical clinics that visit areas where refugees are living. Staffed by experienced medical personnel, the clinics offer consultations, immunizations, treatments and health and nutritional information, particularly for mothers.

Another important aspect is providing psychological support for dealing with the traumatic experience of war. "Our psychologists are witnessing cases of severe depression, anxiety and aggression. Children are traumatized and live in constant fear. They have a strong reaction to the slightest noise and are afraid to be left alone," explains Dr. Rita Rayhem, Chief of Medical Services at Caritas Lebanon.

Over the last two years, this medical aid has reached 35,000 families.

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is also supporting Caritas Lebanon in providing winterization kits that include blankets, heaters, stoves and fuel; housing subsidies; mattresses; tents; hygiene kits; and food baskets.

Other partners: **Catholic Relief Services Lebanon** and the **Good Shepherd Sisters**: Distribution of food baskets; distribution of tents, blankets, clothing, stoves and wood. / **CFGB with Caritas Lebanon**: Distribution of food vouchers.

"We provide medicine for babies and chronic diseases such as diabetes, diarrhea and hypertension. Many of the illnesses are seasonal, so in winter we will see more tonsillitis, pneumonia and in summer respiratory illnesses and diarrhea. We see between 50 and 70 people per day. When I started a year ago, we used to see less than 30 to 50 people. There has definitely been a big increase."

**Aline Ephrema**, nurse with Caritas Lebanon



# Jordan

AMOUNT COMMITTED:

**\$3,670,000**



People reached:  
**46,000**

## Working with Caritas Jordan: Creating community for refugees

For refugees arriving in their host country, the challenges are daunting. Scarred by the violence they have fled, they must find the strength to start over. Caritas Jordan and DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, with funding from DFATD, are helping refugees settle in their new environment with welcome centres that guide them in accessing services and responding to their essential needs.

At the centres, refugees can receive housing subsidies, winter supplies, food coupons, medical and dental care, psychological support, training workshops and remedial classes for children so that they can integrate into school.

But above and beyond the services offered, these centres provide a community space for refugees – an important element in retaining a sense of normalcy and finding solace with others who have lived through similar experiences. Refugees who visit the centre often bring along a new arrival, proud to help a fellow refugee gain a footing. In fact, many of the refugees who first come to the centres to receive services become volunteers themselves, offering a sense of community to newcomers that helps to ease the pain of starting over.

Other partners: **JRS**: Schooling for refugee children; literacy, continuing education and skills training for adults; psychological support; help in accessing services.

"We had a normal life. We went to university. We had friends. And then suddenly we had nothing. We were cold, hungry, and alone. We were foreigners. We knew nobody here. We became friends with our neighbours and they told me about Caritas. Here at Caritas, I felt the spirit of love. I felt their mission and it was close to my heart. For me, working in a Christian organization is not strange. I had many Christian friends back home. I just want to help Syrians, especially the children."

**Rahaf Al Jabar**, 20, who is from the Syrian capital of Damascus. She fled with her family to Jordan after her father was threatened. Today, Rahaf is a volunteer with Caritas Jordan.

Photo credit: Giulia Amati/ Caritas



# Turkey

AMOUNT COMMITTED:  
**\$100,000**

 People reached:  
**24,000**

**Working with Caritas Turkey:  
Ensuring that no refugee  
is forgotten**

Turkey is the country which is hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees – over 1.6 million. There are now 22 camps in the country, but they are all overpopulated. As such, many refugees have had to find shelter in cities and villages that lie along the border with Syria. Conditions for these refugees are extremely difficult, as the places where they have found themselves are ill-prepared to receive them.

Caritas Turkey and DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE have focused on filling the gap for these refugees, who have little or no access to services, particularly in the province of Hatay, where there are an estimated 120,000 refugees.

Already, over 3,000 families have been provided with supplies for winter, medical support, food vouchers and other basic necessities.



## LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

**DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE  
believes that beyond aid,  
there must be change  
for a better future in  
the region.**

Sadly, this crisis seems far from over. DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is committed to continue its solidarity with the people of Syria, and to supporting our partners in providing aid to those most affected.

For DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, however, solidarity is not only focused on responding to immediate needs, but also on walking side by side with our partners and those striving for peace and justice to build a better future.

We are supporting local organizations in the region, such as Caritas Middle East and North Africa (MONA), Search for Common Ground, and a joint project between Catholic Relief Services and the group Adyan, in their efforts to improve living conditions, re-launch economic and educational activities, and promote peace and democracy.

We are also supporting our partners in ensuring that the plight of the people caught in this crisis is not forgotten.

Photo credit: Caritas Turkey

## THE NEED FOR PEACE

**Faced with the ongoing  
violence in Syria and the  
suffering of the Syrian  
people, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE  
cannot remain passive.**

In February 2014, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution that called for an end to direct and indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Syria and for a guarantee that humanitarian aid would reach the millions of people who need it. Nearly one year later, the armed conflict is more intense than ever, and attacks against civilian areas continue, as does the use of weapons that kill indiscriminately. In addition, the delivery of humanitarian aid is still severely hindered.

As such, we are asking the Canadian government to do everything in its power to:

- Increase funding for aid to Syrian victims of the crisis, engage in long-term efforts for reconciliation and reconstruction within the country, and actively require that all parties involved in the conflict respect international humanitarian law, in particular with regards to the protection of civilians and the assurance of unhindered access to humanitarian aid.

- Encourage the creation of a pluralistic and inclusive society, whose different communities, including minorities, will be respected, and amplify the voice of all Syrians working for a free and peaceful Syria without ethnic, religious or social discrimination.
- Actively contribute to an inclusive peace process, knowing that a lasting solution to this conflict can only be a diplomatic and negotiated one, and introduce economic and political measures to put an end to the violence, such as initiatives to curtail the sources of financing and weapons of the belligerent parties.

We invite you to sign our petition online at [www.devp.org/syria](http://www.devp.org/syria) and add your voice to the call for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria.

“Above all, I think of all the children who are robbed of their hope for a better life and a decent future. Killed children, wounded children, mutilated children, orphans, children who play with remnants of war instead of toys. Children who don't know how to smile. Please stop! I ask you with all my heart. It's time to stop. Stop it please!”

Pope Francis



Photo credit: Caritas Turkey



# THANK YOU

**Thank you for your generosity!  
We could not have the impact that  
we do without your solidarity.**

We would also like to thank the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops for its prayers for the people of Syria and for joining us in appealing to Catholics and Canadians at-large to support our Syrian sisters and brothers affected by this war.

The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada has been an indispensable partner in helping to relieve the suffering of those most affected by this crisis. We would also like to thank the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for its support in helping to provide food aid.

And words cannot express our admiration and respect for our local partners, who put their lives at risk daily to be at the service of others.

Photo credits: Stefan Maier/Caritas Austria; Val Morgan/SCIAF; Caritas Internationalis

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is still accepting donations to continue to respond to the needs of the population. To learn more on how you can contribute, visit [www.devp.org/syria](http://www.devp.org/syria) or call 1 888 234-8533.



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