

UPF Lebanon's Syrian Refugee Aid Program

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Relief activity includes handing out cash

In the past two years, Lebanon has experienced a great influx of refugee families from Syria. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the estimated number of refugees in Lebanon at the beginning of this year is 1.2 million. (Lebanon's population is 6 million.) The UN, as well as many other organizations, such as Caritas, is trying its best to help those families, who are entirely dependent on help for shelter, food and clothing.

In light of the refugees' severe situation and their great need, in early June 2014, UPF Lebanon with the support of our ambassadors for peace initiated a special aid program in a refugee camp approximately forty minutes outside Beirut.



Preparing relief items

We are supporting fifty-three families, who live in humble tents. Thanks to great support from our sponsors, UPF International and IRFF Germany, we were able to give donate money, at first, to a certain number of families. In December, we donated an equal amount to almost all the families in the camp. The same month, in cooperation with the Lebanese American University, which is among the top universities in Lebanon, we were able to distribute thirty-three boxes filled with food, clothing and many toys.

This was part of the university students' special Christmas charity activity. Thanks to the great cooperation of the camp manager and his wife, the distribution of goods went well. The refugee families in the camp come from different parts of Syria. In the face of grave danger, they had no choice but to leave their homes, if they still had homes to leave. Some of them had lost close family members or other loved ones, not to mention having lost -- in seconds -- houses or shops they had cared for over many years.

We visit the camp on a regular basis, with ambassadors of peace, young volunteers, and our national leader Mr. Park Jong-in and his wife Yola. Usually we bring milk or some food or diapers for the babies. We register the families one by one. According to UNHCR, registration is more than a head count. Knowing the number of people helps determine the amount of assistance needed and a record of the refugees' status helps protect them from being forced to return to their country and from arbitrary arrest.

While registering people we listened to their heart-wrenching stories. Among them are several people with serious injuries from the war, including from chemical weapons attacks.

After learning about the great medical need, UPF Lebanon was able to recruit a medical team, which goes to the camp to offer free consultations, diagnosis and to prescribe medicine. They also prepare medical

reports for those needing treatment in a hospital. We were able to establish a cooperative relationship with a government hospital in a city near the camp. This means that the refugees, visiting the hospital under the auspices of UPF, receive special discounts, from 30–50 percent or even more. Additionally, certain medication is free of charge.



Refugee families receiving relief

Most of the tents have no electricity; hence, they are mostly in darkness from about five o'clock in the afternoon, as it is wintertime. During the winter in Lebanon, snow falls in the mountainous area; however this year, temperatures below 0°C and stormy weather -- heavy rain and even snowfall -- hit other areas in Lebanon, including the camp. The cold weather worsens an already tough situation for the families, especially for those with small children. Four refugees died from the cold.

We have been trying to collect money to provide all tents with electricity via generators. According to the camp manager around USD3,000 is needed. We could raise a certain amount thanks to contributions from our members in various countries. So far, we have about half of the amount needed. Inshallah [God willing], we will soon be able to collect the funding needed for the electricity as well as some for sealing the rooftops of the tents to keep the rain out.

Mr. and Mrs. Park feel compassion toward the refugees. Mr. Park mentioned that seeing the misery in the camp reminded him of the harsh circumstances Korea faced during the Korean War. Further, he is

concerned about the future for the many children there, as they cannot attend school.



Toys for the children of refugee families

Actually, the list of the refugee's needs is endless. We try to address them gradually. Based on our experience so far, the volunteers agree that with cooperation and mutual effort we can help these families more effectively.

Our sincere hope is that all the refugees will be able to return to their homes in the near future. In the meantime, we shall continue to do our best to help them in the difficult circumstances they face.

Our special thanks go to UPF International and IRFF Germany, and to all those who have contributed to this effort.

All *hamdulillah* (All praise and thanks be to God).