GHOUTA, DAMASCUS: REPORTING THE CURRENT HUMANITARIAN SITUATION, AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF NON-FOOD ITEMS TO MORE THAN 100,000 IDP’S FROM EAST GHOUTA

Photo: Adra - Samara’s Aid Appeal

In April 2018 Samara’s Aid Appeal sent 101.38 tonnes of non-food aid, collected by churches, individuals, and community groups across the UK to Al Ghouta outside Damascus. During April, May, and June we distributed this aid in East and West Ghouta, with assistance from local partners, to 11,492 displaced families who fled from their homes in East Ghouta. Family sizes ranged between five and fifteen people with an average of ten, including extended family. More than 100,000 displaced people were served with clothes, shoes, bedding, hygiene items mobility and medical aid as well as care packs for pregnant and post-natal women and families, dignity bags for women and girls as well as hygiene bags for children.

Thirteen large distributions were carried out in areas including Adra, Al Nashabia, Herjalla, Tal Al Nasir and Al Dwir, Al Kiswa. While a significant number of individuals were served, the volume and needs of these vulnerable people far exceeded our available resources. Some camps contained families who fled when their homes were first taken by jihadis, while most of the people served had arrived in these camps since the early part of 2018. These arrived only with what they could carry on foot, which in many cases were their small children. Many arrived with nothing except the clothes they were wearing.
Most families served were crammed into communal buildings and structures, small rooms, tents, and tarpaulin structures unfit for living in. In some instances, single individuals with no family were sleeping side by side in communal tents and marquee style structures. Some families were accommodated in public buildings and schools with large numbers of people living side by side in very small spaces. Most of these camps and settlements were overfilled far beyond their capacity with the displaced people having made their own makeshift shelters from plastic sheets and tarpaulins held together with ropes, stones, pieces of wood and mud. Many of these were set up against the sides of buildings and in wasteland to accommodate the enormous influx of people who fled through the humanitarian corridors from East Ghouta during the intense bombing and fighting as the siege was being broken earlier this year.
Significant numbers of the children in these camps had no footwear and roamed the camp barefoot. Some children were seen walking through the camps with just one oversized shoe or sandal, while other children were seen around the camps wearing odd shoes (one shoe and one sandal) of significantly different sizes. A significant number of the children and adults were wearing filthy clothes, many of which were torn or damaged.
Many individuals served had disabilities caused by the fighting. They reported the lack of medical care in the area under siege which exacerbated their injuries. Many watched family members die through lack of adequate medical provision. Numerous beneficiaries reported that some of the medical points and hospitals in East Ghouta while under siege were taken by jihadist fighters who employed unqualified people like builders and iron fabricators as doctors, and many people were afraid to use these facilities, even when there was nowhere else to go.

We gave wheelchairs and mobility aids to a substantial number of amputees who stated their legs or feet were removed by people with no medical training working as doctors in the hospitals and medical points in besieged East Ghouta. Others described being treated very badly, being denied treatment, and even being threatened with amputation of injured but salvageable limbs unless they paid extortionate sums of money for the correct treatment.
In May Damascus experienced heavy rain which completely flooded certain parts of the city. The temporary, piecemeal structures that people are living under in Ghouta are woefully inadequate to offer protection from any extreme weather or even ordinary rain.

Certain parts of East Ghouta have remained as inaccessible military zones since the siege was broken earlier this year and those who fled had been unable to return. Many people served have no homes to return to as the destruction in certain areas is extensive. Some of these displaced people have begun to return to their homes in East Ghouta as and when access has been allowed following the clearing of mines and unexploded devices.

All photographs provided by Samara’s Aid Appeal from distributions in Ghouta in April, May, and June 2018.

Samara’s Aid Appeal is a UK based charity run exclusively by volunteers committed to enabling donated money and aid to directly help the intended beneficiaries rather than paying for UK salaries and avoidable overheads.

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