DEIR EZ-ZOR: REPORTING THE CURRENT SITUATION, AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF NON-FOOD ITEMS AND FOOD TO MORE THAN 80,000 PEOPLE IN NEED

In December 2017 Samara’s Aid Appeal distributed food and non-food items, with partners, to 80,434 people in and around the city of Deir Ez-zor, Syria. Clothing, shoes, bedding, hygiene and mobility items were distributed, together with dignity bags for women and girls, hygiene bags for children and care packs for post-natal women with babies. This aid was sent from the UK. 20 tonnes of food were also distributed in partnership with other NGO’s.

9,984 families, averaging eight people per family, were served through 50 distributions in areas on both the East and West side of the Euphrates including Al Mayadeen, the City of Deir Ez-zor, Al Shmeitiyeh, Al Masrab, Al Harabesh Quarter, Al Jarfa. Relief items were distributed to families in need who suffered under the siege of the Islamic State group, to families displaced to this area, as well as to families displaced from these areas who have recently returned. Special distributions were also arranged for orphans and widows as well as children with disabilities.

Children wearing torn and filthy clothing stood in bare feet and flip flops in the street in mid-December, queuing for this aid.

A mother was seen queuing at one of these aid distributions in December holding her baby who was naked from waist down, while everyone else who had coats was wearing them to keep warm.

Deir Ez-zor is located in the East of Syria on the Euphrates River and was under siege by the Islamic State group for three years until the siege was broken in September 2017, and Syrian government forces subsequently took full control in November. Civilians report having been subjected to torture, forced marriage and sexual slavery, extortionate...
taxations, punishment by beating and amputation and public executions as well as being used as human shields, among other atrocities under the control of the Islamic State group.

Now that the fighting has calmed, people are returning to their homes. SAA relief co-ordinators in Deir Ez-zor estimated that tens of thousands of people returned to their homes in and around Deir Ez-zor during the month of December. This influx was partly due to the construction of a new bridge over the Euphrates river to replace the bridges which were destroyed when the Islamic State group took control of the area. Access between the East and West of the river had been very difficult until this time. Local media sources have also reported an influx of displaced people to the governate of Deir Ez-zor fleeing fighting in the region of Idlib. Returnees and have found their homes have either been destroyed, damaged or looted. They have little or nothing to return to and brought little or nothing with them.

Close to 900,000 people are estimated to be living in and around the area of Deir Ez-zor (UNHCR). SAA relief coordinators witnessed overwhelming levels of extreme deprivation and poverty.

The distribution of relief items was more challenging due to the large numbers of people, which increased daily, and because of their extensive needs and desperation. The team carried out pre-distribution assessments of villages in the surrounding area, but on returning the next day the numbers of families had increased with new arrivals and returnees. On some occasions the crowds of people waiting for aid were starting to crush each other and the aid workers. On one occasion the team had to abort a distribution because it became too dangerous to continue.

Aid distributions were further complicated by the lack of law and order witnessed in and around the area. Fighting between gangs of thieves was witnessed on numerous occasions and additional security had to be provided to ensure the safety of the relief team and the aid itself after attempted thefts were deflected.

People in and around Deir Ez-zor remain without running water, electricity, internet and mobile telephone reception is limited.

Food is more available than during the Islamic State group siege but the difficulties in transportation to the area together with the high-risk nature of the area make this supply more expensive than in other parts of Syria. Additionally a large proportion of food supply for this area historically came from local agriculture, but many farmers in the area are now wary of tending land that is riddled with multiple landmines and explosive devices. Vendors in the area are selling food at inflated prices to an already impoverished community, partly as a result of their increased supply costs and because of the lack of competition. The overall food situation in Deir Ez-zor remains inadequate for the needs.

The medical situation in Deir Ez-zor is extremely troubling with the majority of ordinary people having little or no access to hospital care should they need it. The one free government hospital in the city is partially destroyed, under staffed, and lacking many of the most basic supplies and resources. Many people are dying from lack of medical care for conditions that could be easily treated if the right resources were available. The manager of the renal dialysis unit
at Al Assad Hospital stated that although they have the machines needed for dialysis, they lacked the associated consumable supplies needed to carry out enough life-saving treatments each week.

There are very few NGO’s providing any assistance in and around Deir Ez-zor in spite of the enormity of the needs. It remains a very challenging place to gain access to and the area continues to be very dangerous with extremely tight security controls.

The team at Samara’s Aid Appeal are thankful to have had the opportunity to meet some of the basic needs of so many in this challenging area. This is thanks to our courageous Syrian team on the ground, in addition to the huge number of volunteers from churches and communities around the UK who have supported this work to ensure this aid could be delivered to the people who need it most.

Samara’s Aid Appeal is in the final stages of planning the implementation of a medical team in Deir Ez-zor as part of their “Meditainer” project to provide life-saving emergency medical care, free of charge, to the people in and around Deir Ez-zor. An additional £360,000 would enable this team to provide a more comprehensive service, ultimately saving more lives.

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. 100% of donations, including gift aid, given to these medical projects goes directly to covering this medical work in Syria, with no UK overheads.

Contact: [www.samarasaidappeal.org](http://www.samarasaidappeal.org)
PO Box 5490, BN50 8PE, United Kingdom
Samara’s Aid Appeal is a charity registered in England and Wales number 1171707.