MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (MCC) NEWS RELEASE
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Blurb: Through grants from the Canadian government, MCC is providing rent assistance and other household supplies to Iraqis displaced by the Islamic State group and personal supplies to Syrians affected by the war in Syria.

The first step: Supporting displaced families in Iraq and Syria
By Emily Loewen

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WINNIPEG, Man. – It’s been a year since Qasim left his home in Sinjar, Iraq. He was fleeing an advance by the Islamic State group – the same one that left tens of thousands of other Yazidis stranded in the mountains, trapped between hunger and dehydration and the threat of mass violence.

Qasim and his parents and three brothers, along with their wives and children, were able to get away from Sinjar, to a crowded camp for displaced people, and then into the Kurdish-controlled area of Iraq. Qasim’s last name is not being used for his family’s security.

Back in Sinjar, life had been good. The families made a living from the farms and shops they owned, and they lived close to each other in the village.

After being displaced, all 29 members of Qasim’s extended family lived together for 10 months in an unfinished building owned by a friend near the city of Erbil. The roof leaked, the floors were wet and mold grew on the walls. They had no source of water.

Now the families are able to rent two apartments near Erbil because of a rent assistance project carried out by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner organization, Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health (REACH). The project provides monthly rent allowances for approximately 570 households in Erbil and Kirkuk, using a CA$1.9 million (US$1.55 million) grant given to MCC by the Canadian government.

In both cities many displaced people live in unfinished houses, said Hawkar Aziz, project manager with REACH. “No doors, no windows, bad sanitation, no water,” he said, “as well as no furniture, no property, because they came [here] with nothing.”

For Qasim and his family, the rent assistance is one step towards building a new life. The news they hear from Sinjar is bad, so they hope to find work and stay in Erbil. The family lives in a new development with affordable housing. They hope to register their children in an Arabic-language school this year. “It’s not perfect, but it’s better than anything else,” Qasim said.

Two other Canadian government grants are also supporting MCC’s response to the Syria and Iraq Crisis.

In Iraq’s Baghdad and Najaf governorates (like provinces), a CA$1.2 million (US$976,000) grant is providing essential items to displaced families. More than 1,960 households are receiving locally purchased kitchen supplies, water filters and hygiene kits. Each kit includes items such as soap, towels and laundry detergent. The project is being implemented by MCC partner Première Urgence Internationale—Aide Médicale Internationale, and will also provide training on sanitation and hygiene practices to help prevent waterborne illnesses.
In Syria, a CA$1.5 million (US$1.19 million) grant is providing children’s clothing, hygiene kits and feminine hygiene supplies to 4,300 households. The distribution is being done by MCC partner Middle East Council of Churches in Daraa Province, where fighting continues in the countryside.

The crisis is now in its fifth year. Since 2012 MCC has responded with more than $30 million (CA and US dollars) in emergency relief, education, peacebuilding and trauma support for people in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. MCC continues to accept contributions to help people in these countries whose lives have been affected by ongoing violence.

_Mennonite Central Committee: Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ_

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*Emily Loewen is a writer for MCC Canada.*

Caption 53339: Qasim and 28 other family members used this makeshift kitchen in an unfinished building where they lived together for 10 months after being displaced from their homes in Sinjar, Iraq, by the Islamic State group. (MCC photo/Kaitlin Heatwole)

Caption 53340: Qasim and 28 other family members lived together in this makeshift living area attached to an unfinished building for 10 months after being displaced from their homes in Sinjar, Iraq, by the Islamic State group. (MCC photo/Kaitlin Heatwole)

Caption 53338: Qasim, right, with his brother Haji, center, and mother Huda sit in the living area of the new apartment they rent using assistance from a project with MCC's partner organization Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health. The project is funded by a Canadian government grant. (MCC Photo/Kaitlin Heatwole)

Caption 53337: This is the kitchen in a new apartment near Erbil, Iraq, rented by Qasim’s family using rent assistance from a project with MCC’s partner organization Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health and funded by a Canadian government grant. (MCC Photo/Kaitlin Heatwole)

_NOTE:_ To download the photos, visit the News Service 2015 photo collection at [https://mccmediaspace.org/pages/search.php?search=collection1676&k=82ce043a58](https://mccmediaspace.org/pages/search.php?search=collection1676&k=82ce043a58). If you have any questions, contact Brenda Burkholder, MCC U.S. Communications, at BrendaBurkholder@mcc.org or 717-859-1151.