DRAMATIC PHOTOS FROM SYRIA – A sudden drone strike torches 100 tents at a camp in Idleb Governorate, and ShelterBox aid is given to evacuees from the ‘starvation siege’ town of Madaya

These are the grim realities of Syria captured on camera by aid workers – scenes of devastation as a drone creates an explosion that burns a hundred tents. Meanwhile weary evacuees, pawns in a deal to trade fighters, queue for ShelterBox aid.

Tented encampments engulfed in fire after an airborne explosion.

Adults and children scrambling for aid as they are housed in so-called ‘collective centres’ as part of a trade-off with fighters. And the constant battle against wind-damaged shelter as people try to live in this open and exposed landscape.

This is northern Syria, Idleb Governorate. At a displacement camp a drone is said to have dropped a missile triggering an explosion, possibly of gas canisters. Thankfully, although as many as a hundred tents were destroyed and most personal possessions lost, there were no fatalities and only three recorded injuries.

Country Director for ShelterBox partners Hand in Hand for Syria, Fadi Al Dairi says, ‘We look at images like these with deep sorrow and sympathy. Around 100 tents have been lost and will need to be replaced in addition to people’s belongings. We are currently coordinating our efforts in order to satisfy the needs, in the hope that these incidents will not happen again.’

The lost tents were not aid provided by either ShelterBox or their partners, though discussions are being held about how they will be replaced. Hand in Hand for Syria provided these photos – they are long term partners of ShelterBox in Syria, delivering aid directly into war-torn areas of the country discreetly and efficiently.
In recent days they have been trucking in supplies to urban collective centres that are housing families who quit the mountain town of Madaya, scene of the notorious ‘starvation siege’ which saw around 40,000 residents trapped by a military stand-off. For over a year they lived only on meagre rations of rice delivered in occasional aid convoys. When the siege broke last October children and the elderly were showing the effects of famine and could barely walk straight. Months without meat or milk had seen many making soup out of grass in the search for nutrition.

Now, although they are being fed and are relatively safe, they find themselves pawns in a relocation deal between rebels and the government. Hand in Hand aid workers have been shipping in ShelterBox mattresses, cooking equipment, water carriers, blankets and other basic items to families in the appointed collective centres, and to those staying nearby with friends and relatives or with host families.

Photos show the desperate clamour for this aid as people queue, some making precarious onward journeys overloading bikes and vans.

Another aid drop in recent days has seen tents distributed to a timeworn displacement camp in Idlib Governorate. The climate of extreme temperatures takes its toll on canvas, and many of these threadbare tents have standing in the open for years. ShelterBox and Hand in Hand have now arranged for some to be replaced.

ShelterBox Operations Coordinator Sam Hewett says, ‘79 tents were distributed to replace broken tents. I don’t know how long they’d been living there - it varies between a few months to years. The Hand in Hand team has a network, either they are asked directly by a local council, or the shelter aid cluster notifies them. Then HiH do an assessment and confirm exact numbers, and decide whether it is appropriate to respond.’

NOTES TO EDITORS
• The photos above are free to use in the context of this press release. Please credit ©Hand in Hand for Syria.

• ShelterBox can offer interviews on aid delivery in Syria, but we regret that in-country interviewees cannot be provided for security reasons. Please arrange via marknicholson@shelterbox.org or Tel 07584 489194.