The man who lost a hand and foot for a bag of flour at Al Mayadeen, Deir Ez-zor

Samara’s Aid Appeal provided relief items for a family living in a village outside Al Mayadeen in the governate of Deir Ez-Zor. The team interviewed the father of three who paid a brutal price, for trying to feed his hungry children. They were suffering the effects of hunger and deprivation under the rule of the Islamic State group.

His eyes showed the hopelessness and hurt he has lived with, as he recounted the events which took his son’s life nearly four years ago. After ISIS took control of the area they were living in, some of their fighters hit his seven-year-old son with their vehicle. He described it as an accident. But the fighters did not stop to help, and the boy died as a result of his injuries.

“He would be eleven now if he was still alive.” The father said, still struggling to accept the loss of his son.
His young daughter sat on the floor nearby, silently listening to her father tell the horror story she has heard many times. Together with the other atrocities she has witnessed, her innocence has been shattered and these events will shape her personality and the direction of her life. As she listened, she fed her newborn baby brother who was lying on the floor, his head supported by a stained pillow as he guzzled his bottle of milk.

He went on to describe how ISIS demanded al-zakat taxes from all the civilians in the area, but instead of using them to care for the poor, they used them to support their fighters and their families. He spoke of how ISIS took all their food and kept it in large storehouses and covered pits dug in the desert, while the civilians in the area and their children went hungry.

He struggled to find work during the reign of IS and resorted to helping sellers in the limited markets in exchange for a few vegetables for his family. Over time the markets stopped trading and he was unable to feed his family at all.

Watching his children suffer from hunger drove him to desperation. He stole a bag of flour from one of the IS storehouses in the desert. No more than 5kgs, he told our team. Just one bag to make bread for his family.

A few days later he was arrested and taken to an ISIS police station. He described how every part of his body was beaten from head to foot, then being put in a tiny cell of around one meter by one meter. He was hung from the ceiling by his hands, blindfolded, and was tortured and beaten for four or five days with no food. After this he was taken to one of the ISIS courts.

In the ISIS court he said he was forced to his knees, while the judge accused him of stealing flour. As he knelt on the floor, he was flogged with a leather whip.

The father spoke of his reply to the judge, challenging the accusation against him of being a thief. He told the judge that ISIS had stolen everything from the civilian people, and he was taking only what belonged to him and to the poor people of the area. He accused ISIS of taking everything for their own families and fighters and of storing all their food in the desert while the children and poor people were starving.

Angry, the judge accused him of stealing because he has no fear of punishment by God. The father replied

“You do not know God.”

The judge responded saying that they would see how brave he would be when they cut off his hand and foot.
He described being taken to a medical centre in Al Mayadeen in a school underground, where his right hand was cut off above the wrist and his left foot was cut off above the ankle. He described how they hit his leg repeatedly to break the bones. His family were then told to take him away.

They took him back to their village outside Al Mayadeen and he described the awful situation that he was left in. He was desperate for help, but no one helped. There was no way of providing food for his family and he was desperate for just a couple of dollars. There was no longer any possibility of being able to work. He said most of the people in his village had some kind of help from outside to survive, but they had no-one to depend on except God.

His newborn son was a week old when our team visited him. His name Ayman means “right hand”. The bitter irony is that this was also the name of his older brother whose life was tragically lost four years before when he was killed on the road by ISIS. The father explained that he does not want the memory of his older son to die so he gave the same name to his new baby. Perhaps this baby will become his right hand in the years to come.

Now this man and his family face a bleak and uncertain future in a country where even the able-bodied citizens struggle to find employment that will pay a living wage.

For this man, the price of bread was far beyond his means to pay.

This family received a care pack including hygiene items, underwear, towels and educational items for the children. They also received food and clothing for the children. These people are among more than 80,000 who received aid from Samara’s Aid Appeal in and around Deir Ez-zor in December 2017. A medical service is in the process of being established in Deir Ez-zor with a view to providing medical assistance in Al Mayadeen in the future to assist the civilian population, who have suffered great deprivation and are living in poverty now.

This report is based on the account of this man whose face we have not shown and whose name we have not included, to respect his dignity.

Samara’s Aid Appeal is a UK-based charity which provides medical and humanitarian assistance in Syria and the Middle East. The UK team is made up exclusively of volunteers to ensure that funds can be channelled to helping the people in need rather than paying for UK overheads.

Contact: www.samarasaidappeal.org
PO Box 5490, BN50 8PE, United Kingdom