

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

RISING FROM THE RUINS

By Kieren Barnes, Head of Tearfund's work in the Middle East

After eight years of intense fighting, communities in Syria are emerging from the rubble. As Tearfund's Middle East Response Director, I recently travelled to Syria. I went to plan, with our partners, how best we can serve people as they look to the future...

Arriving in a bustling, busy and developed Damascus, it was hard to believe this was the same battered and broken Syria that we've grown used to seeing in the media. That is until we began travelling on the road out of the capital.

Huge parts of Damascus have been destroyed, and in the cities of Homs and Aleppo collapsed apartment blocks lie everywhere. There was no reassuring glow of street lights, no lights on in apartments. And yet, people are returning to these empty streets and crumbling buildings, determined to pick up the pieces of their lives.

Each time I visit Syria, I'm reminded of how friendly everybody is, how welcoming they are. On this visit though, I also saw the contrast between different parts of the country. Some areas are still functioning fairly normally, some are starting to rebuild.

In other areas where there's been the most destruction, the pain is tangible. People are trying to move forward, but the suffering that's taken place has left scars beyond the broken buildings.

Being there

Tearfund has mostly been working with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan – providing food and shelter, and offering trauma counselling. Meeting people's immediate needs has been vital, and this will continue inside Syria, where over 6 million people are still displaced.

But we have now been registered to set up an office in Syria. It means we can employ local people who know their country better than anybody, and we can support them as they in turn support their communities.

Alongside churches and other local organisations, we will be providing livelihoods training and business grants – helping people to reactivate old businesses or start new ones. Being registered in Syria means that we can be among the people and organisations we're working with.

Travelling the road together

In a village just outside Homs I saw, first hand, the difference that livelihoods training and investment is making. People were starting up small shops, beauty salons, car repair services. One family we chatted to, who had been forced to flee from IS twice, felt secure about their future for the first time in many years.

Among the ruins, lives and communities are being restored. It's going to be a long road but, thanks to our registered status, it's a road that Tearfund will be travelling with the people of Syria.

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for all those people affected by conflict in Syria as they start to look towards a more peaceful future.
- Ask God for the resources and for the right staff as Tearfund grows its work in Syria. Pray also for staff and volunteers as they travel around the country, for their safety.
- Pray for Tearfund to have wisdom as we develop our strategy in Syria.

A NOTE FROM...

'I have been reporting on the conflict in Syria, and our support for refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, for several years. To hear that Tearfund has been registered to set up an office within the country itself is so encouraging, and an inspiring answer to prayer.'

Andrew Horton, Brand and Communications Team

STEPPING INTO THE GAP

Annabelle is volunteering with Tearfund Go for three months in Zambia, before she embarks on a career in healthcare. The contrast between medical care and facilities in the UK and rural Zambia couldn't be more stark. However, local churches and Christians are stepping into the gap...

As we get off the bus into the afternoon sun, we hear cries of, 'Mzungu, Mzungu, Mzungu!' – an affectionate local term for white people. We are greeted by an abundance of young, gleaming smiles – word has spread that there are visitors in the community.

Children run and shout from all directions, multiplying as they draw closer. Their hands reach out and trace the lines and freckles of our skin. We have been in Zambia for just over a month now and we are becoming accustomed to being followed around by crowds of excited children.

We are on our way to meet Esther*. Esther is a patient at the local clinic run by the Jubilee Centre, the Tearfund partner I am working with for three months. My mind is whirring with questions and words of encouragement that I want to share with Esther, who is living with HIV.

Real life

The trail of children gradually disperses as we near Esther's home. We sit under a sparse tree, which offers little shade from the glaring sun. Her one-year-old son, Daniel*, is with her; full of life and with the most entrancing, sparkling eyes. We learn that he is also living with HIV, and our hearts sink. The burden of the truth is starting to hit: this is an epidemic and it doesn't discriminate against age.

When it comes to asking my carefully constructed questions I draw a blank. My breath is taken away by the pain of it all. HIV is something we've heard and learned about, but here are the full effects of it on someone's life. Instead of talking, I sit and listen, praying with them before we leave.

This was the first of three visits we made that day. God broke our hearts for his people. Our eyes were opened to the injustice of unequal access to healthcare. Why are some people able to access treatment for things like HIV and others not? I felt a burning anger at the injustice.

Rewriting the story

Then I met Pastor Josephine. She works in the Jubilee Centre's crowded health clinic. Josephine has been striving hard to provide health screening for all. She travels around communities, visiting and encouraging people to take simple diagnostic tests, while they can still be treated. Malaria, TB and HIV diagnoses are all too common.

Jubilee Centre is a Tearfund partner in Ndola, Zambia that empowers local churches and communities to offer the physical and emotional support we might expect to find through the GP or professional counselling in the UK.

People sometimes complain that British healthcare is like that of 'a developing nation'. They would be shocked by the reality in rural Zambia. So many of the things they take for granted are conspicuous by their absence.

Thankfully, Ndola has Pastor Josephine. She has stepped into the gap and works tirelessly to support people like Esther and Daniel. And there are many more like her. Please pray for them today.

Visit www.tearfund.org/go to find out more about how our partners are bridging the gap in healthcare, and see for yourself with a Tearfund Go placement.

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*

FROM 'LIVING IN HELL' TO LIVING IN HOPE

A young family face unspeakable tragedy at the hands of ISIS, then make a dramatic escape.

Before the conflict, Samera* ran a beauty salon from her home in Mosul, Iraq. Life was stable, and Samera remembers being happy, even though her family weren't well off. Samera felt safe, and enjoyed working to support her four children.

'Like living in hell'

Life changed dramatically when ISIS arrived in Mosul. 'They destroyed our life completely', Samera says. When the family first heard about ISIS and the crimes they were committing in Syria, they never thought that the group would come to Mosul.

When ISIS took over the city 'they did whatever they wanted,' Samera says. 'They killed our dreams, our confidence. They burned our homes, they blew up our mosques, churches and our houses. They took our dignity.'

Samera was told that it was no longer acceptable for a woman to own a business. They took everything from the family, and cut off their access to government rations.

'It was very bad. There were horrible rules we had to follow – it was like living in hell,' Samera tells us. The family longed for the city to be liberated, so that they could return to a normal life. Every day they saw terrible atrocities.

Courage

Once the intense battle to liberate Mosul began, the family faced even more danger, as shells fell every night. They tried to escape, but were caught. Samera's husband was executed in front of the family, including the children.

'My children were screaming loudly and we begged them to not kill my husband but they did. They threatened me, and told me if we say even a word they will kill the rest of my family.'

With extraordinary courage, Samera told herself not to cry. And, to keep them safe, told the children not to say anything about what has happened – in spite of their great pain and grief.

Yet Samera did not give up, and bravely resolved to escape with her children. They left west Mosul and headed to the safer east side of the city. Samera reached her sister's home, where they were welcomed in.

Big hearts

However, things still weren't easy, as food and other essentials were limited. When the city was finally liberated, the family was overjoyed, and couldn't wait to return home.

But once they arrived they were shocked at what they found. All of the family's belongings had been taken, and ISIS had completely destroyed their house. Samera tried to appear strong in front of the children, but she didn't know what to do.

Thankfully, a community leader stepped in to help, and found a place for her to live so Samera and the children did not have to live on the street.

After a couple of months, Samera heard about Tearfund. 'I said, "At last there is someone who wants to help us with his or her big heart."' Several days later, Tearfund visited Samera to assess her situation.

Indescribable

Samera had been borrowing money to pay rent, and was very worried about how to meet the family's most basic needs. But then Tearfund told her she'd be receiving a cash grant. She was overwhelmed with relief.

'Then Tearfund told me that I'd receive cash assistance two more times! We were so glad that Tearfund care for the most vulnerable families. I would like to thank everyone who donated for us.'

In total, Samera received 1,440,000 IQD (roughly £900), which has completely changed the family's situation. She has been able to repay her debts and buy food for her children. She has saved some of the money to be able to support the family for several months, until she finds work.

'I will pray for Tearfund staff and the people who donated for us. The last word I have is: God bless you and protect you. I will pray for you always.'

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Samera and her children. Ask God to continue to heal them and comfort them in their grief.
- Pray that Samera will be able to find stable work so that she can support her family long term.
- Lift up the nation of Iraq. Pray for peace and good governance. And pray for protection upon our local partners and staff there, so that they can continue to help vulnerable people like Samera.

**Name changed to protect identity*

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Please pray for Mali, which has seen a recent spate of terrorist attacks. An attack against the Malian army in Guire killed at least ten soldiers. Please pray for God's peace and protection over Mali's people, as well as our staff and partners.



India is bracing itself for Cyclone Fani, due to hit the east coast on Friday (3 May). Tearfund and our partners have worked with communities to help them prepare for dangerous storms such as this. Please pray for those at risk or affected.



In Venezuela, people have once again taken to the streets to call for a change in political leadership, rallied by the opposition. This has resulted in violent clashes between civilians and the military. Pray for a quick and peaceful resolution to the situation, and for protection over lives in Venezuela.