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What About the Syrian Refugees Left Behind?

An op-ed by ANERA President Bill Corcoran, published on the Huffington Post site in October

In Europe, leaders argue about how many Syrian refugees they will allow into their countries while more than 400,000 wait on their doorstep.

But countries closer to the Syrian war didn't have the luxury of time or distance to deal with 10 times that number when the crisis erupted almost five years ago.

They opened their doors, their land and their resources to men, women and children who fled for their lives.

UNHCR estimates there are more than 4 million refugees in the region bordering Syria. There are more than 1.2 million in Lebanon alone, about one-fourth of the population.

Lebanon's resources are strained beyond reason. Local communities that once opened their doors without hesitation are overwhelmed by the enormity of the crisis and can no longer cope.

While wealthier nations now try to figure out how to handle the crisis, humanitarian organizations have been on the job for years, aiding the most vulnerable families who remain behind in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and inside Syria itself.

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The ANERA newsletter is published quarterly by American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a non-profit agency established in 1968 and dedicated to providing development, health, education and employment programs to Palestinian communities and impoverished families throughout the Middle East.

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COVER PHOTO: With the Syrian crisis in its fifth year, thousands of Syrians still live in refugee camps like this one in northern Lebanon.

Felipe Jacome, photographer

What About the Syrian Refugees Left Behind?

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With the shortage of funding for the major international and UN agencies, humanitarian organizations like ANERA have stepped up their efforts to fill the gap. But we cannot do it alone. This crisis is testing the resolve of world leaders. It is also demanding more sustainable help from private and public organizations and individuals.

When the refugees arrived in Lebanon exhausted and traumatized, they maybe had money, clothes, food and medicine to last weeks. Nearly five years later they are still there. Their savings are gone. The Syrian and Palestinian women and children huddling in Lebanon's makeshift tents, abandoned buildings or the already overcrowded refugee camps are the most vulnerable victims of Syria's war.

They can't return home. They can't move on to more uncertain futures. And they cannot survive without help.

In the short term, help means delivering more blankets and warm clothing, hygiene kits, medicines and food supplies to face the coming cold, wet winter. Nobody wants to see a repeat of last year's photos of children freezing to death because they had no blankets or shelter to keep them safe and alive.

But, we also need to look beyond today because this humanitarian crisis is not going away. Our experience shows that education is an effective, sustainable tool to help Palestinian and Syrian refugees make the best of their new reality and restore a sense of purpose and dignity.

Most refugee youngsters have not attended school since they arrived in Lebanon four years ago, mostly because they need to find whatever work they can to help support their families. ANERA has joined with local organizations to set up free vocational training to teach refugee youth marketable skills like carpentry, plumbing, hairdressing or catering and remedial classes in math, computers and English.

We have witnessed how acquiring a skill and the hope of landing a decent job or pursuing an education restores self-confidence. Britain recently promised \$90 million to Lebanon to help fund education for Syrian refugees. The US just announced it will add more than \$400 million in aid for the refugees. The European Union and other nations should follow their example.

We also cannot ignore Lebanon's poorer rural communities who have so generously welcomed refugees but who now are themselves increasingly vulnerable. They can no longer support the extra strain on water networks, sewage treatment and electricity. Tensions have increased as local populations compete with desperate refugees for jobs and resources in an increasingly fragile economy.

Humanitarian groups have partnered with community organizations to improve basic services and expand sports and other programs to ease tensions. But more needs to be done to invest in the development of these fragile states and protect their stability.

We have accomplished a great deal thanks to the quiet and steadfast generosity of our donors. But we can and must do more. Only a lack of resources slows our efforts.

Last winter ANERA supplied...

3,000 Gaza families, scrambling for the basics after war and floods ravaged their belongings, with vouchers to buy clothes in local stores.

50 preschools in the most war-damaged areas of Gaza with enough durable winter boots for all of their students.

5,800 Palestinian & Syrian families, living in tents and other poor accommodations, with blankets, portable lights, hygiene kits and/or heaters as severe winter storms hit Lebanon.



On Saturday, September 26, some 300 people took to the streets of Minneapolis for the **Dear Gaza Block Party**, a festival and art show benefiting ANERA's medical and relief program.

People of all walks of life came out for the benefit, which kicked off with spoken word performances and a dance routine from Al-Chawam, and continued with a lineup of live music through the evening. Popular local artists like Syrian DJ Hello Psychaleppo and Guante entertained the crowd while attendees wandered around tasting delicious Middle Eastern style street food and mingling with other supporters.

The mastermind behind the Dear Gaza Block Party is 19-year-old **Karmel Sabri**, a Palestinian activist, organizer and artist from the Twin Cities. Karmel first started working with ANERA by helping to plan a fundraiser during the 2014 war in Gaza.

This time, Karmel reached out to ANERA, citing our unique access to Gaza and a positive experience working with our team previously. Karmel said she wanted to organize another event for Gaza because "it was important to keep pursuing the same goal so that people don't forget [about Gaza] and they stay consistent with the cause even though it's not at the top of people's minds."

Karmel decided on an art benefit show because she thought it would draw a larger audience. "Art and music are powerful and captivate audiences who otherwise might not be involved," she explained.

She was correct. Karmel's innovative block party **raised \$20,000 for ANERA's in-kind medical relief program** through donations, sponsorships and merchandise sales.

Karmel recently moved to Miami and hopes to become involved in the activist community there. If she gets the chance to organize more events for charity, she says, "ANERA would be my first choice." **Thank you, Karmel!**



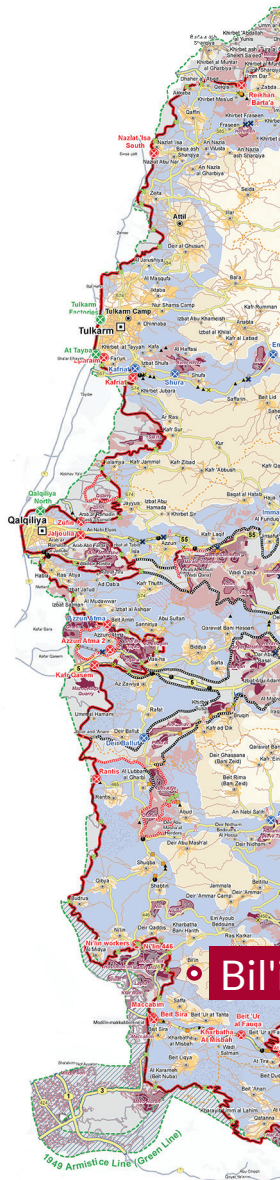
19-year-old Karmel Sabri makes a pitch for ANERA at the event.

Making a Difference Where It Counts

Palestine and Israel are much in the news these days. The violence and crackdowns can remind us how hard it is to feel hopeful in the face of settlement-building and occupation. It is important to know that there is some positive change. **Featured here are four locations where your donations have helped residents who feel isolated and vulnerable.**

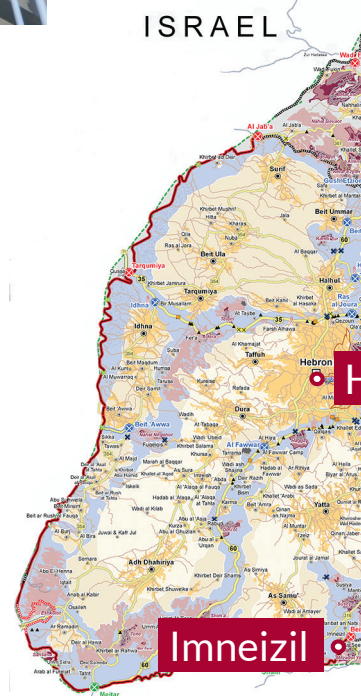
Bil'in

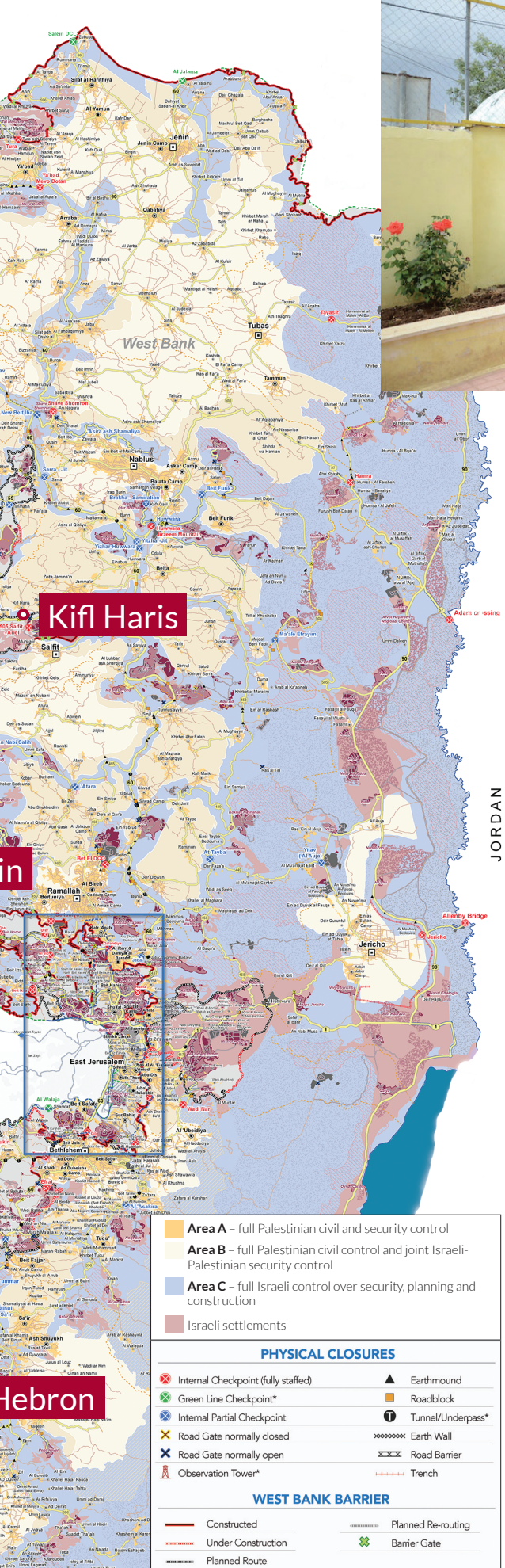
Located next to one of the largest and fastest growing Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Bil'in has become a symbol of resistance as demonstrators have come out weekly for the past 10 years to protest the encroachment of Israel's separation wall. In 2015, ANERA helped this town of 2,200 by building a water reservoir (right picture), restoring their water network, and adding 12 more rooms to the girls' school.



Imneizil

At one of the furthest points south in the West Bank, Imneizil is located right against the separation wall, next to a settlement. It is completely enveloped by the Israeli-administered Area C, where Palestinians cannot build anything. The town is very isolated, with few amenities. ANERA is installing a new water network, an elevated water tank and booster pump as well as street lights, so residents feel safer walking at night.





U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Map of West Bank Access Restrictions

September 2014



Kifl Haris

This village is next to the Tomb of Joshua in an area surrounded by settlements. Ruboo' Al Quds, the preschool we assist in the town, was selected in part because it is very close to the tomb and therefore quite vulnerable. In addition to renovating the interior of the school, ANERA erected high fencing (photo above) along the perimeter to keep settlers from vandalizing the school, which they have done in the past.



Hebron

A settlement in Hebron's Old City has stifled the local Palestinian economy, with checkpoints that make getting in and out of the area very difficult. There is a charitable health clinic, located in the heart of the Old City, that gives impoverished people access to quality, affordable health care. ANERA regularly delivers medicines to the clinic, supplying up to 70% of their stock.

2015 Annual Dinner Report

ANERA's Annual Dinner this year was held in Washington, DC on October 2, 2015. Among the 419 guests, we welcomed staff from Lebanon and the West Bank, including Early Childhood Education Coordinator Sulaima Abu El Haj from our Ramallah office and our new administration and finance manager in Beirut, Sirine Fattoum.

"Promoting health and well-being" was the theme of this year's event. Stories and images from health-related programs were featured and Dena Takruri, host and producer for AJ+, was master of ceremonies.

ANERA honored the United Methodist Committee on Relief and the Zakat Foundation for their quick and generous support of ANERA's programming in times of crisis. And, in what was probably the most poignant moment of the evening, tribute was paid to Charles Maria, who left a bequest of \$1.8 million to ANERA last year. He moved to the U.S. from Lebanon as a boy and worked as an engineer, living a simple life and saving all of his money for charity.

Thanks to sponsorships, seats purchased and donations, the event raised \$340,000 for ANERA's programs that promote health and well-being in Palestine and Lebanon.

ANERA would like to give special recognition to the Embassy of the State of Kuwait for its Diamond sponsorship and the Foundation for Middle East Peace and Robert and Susan Trice for their Ruby sponsorships.

**Save the date for next year:
October 7, 2016.**

PHOTOS (from the top): Executive Director Halil Demir of the Zakat Foundation of America, one of three honorees at the Dinner, accepts a gift from ANERA President Bill Corcoran (left) and ANERA Board Chair Joe Saba (right); Dena Takruri introduces the evening's program; Samar El Yassir (center), ANERA's director of Lebanon programs, mingles with guests at the reception.



Responding to emergencies & investing in Palestinian society



Donate with confidence:
anera.org/donate



What sets ANERA apart?

- ✓ 47 years of life-changing programs.
- ✓ 100 staff members in Palestine and Lebanon.
- ✓ 7 offices across Palestine and Lebanon.
- ✓ Reporting back on what you make possible.

Send checks, made out to ANERA, to: ANERA 1111 14th Street NW, #400 Washington, DC 20005

What About the Syrian Refugees Left Behind?

ANERA News

Fall 2015 | Issue 190

Dear Friend:

I am sure you are glued to the news, like we are, watching events unfold in Palestine and seeing reports of refugees streaming into Europe.

It has been a turbulent period, to say the least. Our staff in Jerusalem and the West Bank monitor conditions on a daily basis to judge whether they can get out to work sites or even go to their offices. In the midst of the chaos, ANERA inaugurated two beautiful preschool facilities – just two examples of how our work continues to make a difference and create some encouraging signs of positive change. As always, it is your support that makes what ANERA does possible.

This will be a difficult winter in Palestine and Lebanon. We hope families stuck in the worst of it can rely on your support in these coming months.

Gratefully,

Bill Lowman
ANERA President

