

18 August 2017

CARITAS WORKING TO PROTECT CIVILIANS THIS WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

Rounds of gunfire and the sound of explosions wake children from their sleep, turning their innocent dreams to terrible nightmares. Traumatic memories of rubble and death may haunt them forever.

On World Humanitarian Day, which falls on 19 August 2017 and takes as its theme, 'Not a target,' Caritas Australia, through the worldwide Caritas network, is protecting innocent civilians; in places like the Central African Republic, Syria, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, Caritas is supporting civilians before, during and after conflicts.

Caritas Australia CEO, Paul O'Callaghan, spoke of the importance of this year's theme, 'Not a target.'

"In crises like this it's not just soldiers and military personnel who are attacked, but innocent civilians as well as aid workers who come under fire."

In 2012, Ali and his wife Zahra [names changed] fled with their family from their farm outside Aleppo when militants aggressively tried to recruit their children.

"Can you believe they offered me money in exchange for my honour, in exchange for the life of my sons?" exclaims Ali in disgust.

"There was no choice but to flee to Damascus." Through the Caritas network, Ali and his family are receiving critical support to survive their displacement and trauma.

Mr O'Callaghan noted the severity of the crisis in Syria, where civilians bear the brunt of the conflict.

"The war in Syria has claimed more than 400,000 lives and uprooted more than half of Syria's 22 million people," Mr O'Callaghan said.

Suzy McIntyre, Humanitarian Programs Coordinator at Caritas Australia, recently returned from a trip to Lebanon and Jordan, where she witnessed the immediate assistance Caritas provides people escaping armed conflict situations, as well as ongoing peace and humanitarian work.

"Caritas is continuing to work with the most vulnerable people in Jordan and Lebanon – the hopeful refugees displaced from Syria and the generous communities hosting them in the neighbouring countries," Mrs McIntyre said.

"We are now seeing displaced children starting school who were born in Lebanon and Jordan and have never actually witnessed the conflict, but still experience the trauma through their parents and due to their displacement."

"Although the crisis in Syria is fading from our TV screens, the ongoing needs of the people impacted must not fade from our conscience".

Caritas media contact: Nicole Clements 0408 869 833 or media@caritas.org.au.