



A Plate for All

April 2009 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

We are happy to announce that with your support A Plate for All's first community food distribution for Iraqi refugees in Syria was a monumental success.

After three months of initial research and planning, six months of fundraising in the US, and three months of on-the-ground coordination with our partner organization, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (GOPA), we have conducted our first round of food distribution, assisting 350 vulnerable Iraqi refugee families in Hassakeh province of northeastern Syria. Our team in Syria—Bridgette Auger, Amelia Reese, Mary Shehadeh (GOPA's Accountant), and Brian Lowe (our most steadfast volunteer supporter)—left Damascus late Monday night, April 6th, and headed east through the desert and across the Euphrates River to arrive in Hassakeh city by early morning. At the bus station, we were greeted by a kindhearted Syrian man named Afram, who is known at the Syrian Orthodox Church as "the godfather of Iraqi refugees" for his tireless commitment to humanitarian work. Afram guided us directly to the first distribution sight, where 200 Iraqis were waiting to receive food.

Throughout both food distributions that day—one assisting 225 families in Hassakeh city and another helping 125 families in Qamishli—the Iraqis were eager to tell us about their lives and situation in Hassakeh. We were able to conduct in-depth interviews with 20 refugees. One woman's story stood out:

Sara grew up in Baghdad, where she married a man named Yusef and had three children—now ages eight, five and four. Sara received a degree in biology at the University of Baghdad, and was working as a researcher in a food lab until the war arrived at her doorstep. In late 2007, Sara found out that her husband Yusef was kidnapped by an insurgent group. As is common in Iraq, Yusef's kidnappers told Sara that in order to free her husband, she must pay a ransom of \$60,000. Sara quickly gathered the money by selling the family's possessions and dipping into their savings. After five days she was able to pay Yusef's ransom, at which point he was released on penalty of death should the kidnappers see him again. Fearing the worst, the family fled Iraq for Syria; they left everything behind. Like most Iraqi refugees living in Hassakeh province, Sara chose the location because the rent was cheaper than in other places. A few months ago, with no work or resettlement options in sight, Yusef smuggled himself into Sweden in hopes of being accepted there as an asylum case. Sara recently received word that Yusef has not yet obtained asylum status in Sweden, but she and her children are awaiting further news—hoping they will be able to join their father but worried that he could return empty-handed any day. Uncertain of what the future may hold, Sara struggles to provide the basic necessities for her family. With hopes that she will one day find a peaceful and prosperous home for her family, all she can do now is provide food, education, and shelter for her children.



Unfortunately this story is the norm among Iraqi refugees. None of the Iraqis we met is permitted to work in Syria. Some children have dropped out of school to support the family as it is easier to obtain lay work as a child.

A Plate For All fills critical gaps in humanitarian aid. We deliver traditional, locally produced, and nutritious foods that refugees do not receive from other sources and we work in areas that would otherwise lack essential aid mechanisms. Currently, each food package contains the following items: vegetable oil, olive oil, powdered milk, tuna, bulgur, lentils, fava beans, chickpeas, and tomato paste.

A Plate for All delivers essential aid. According to the refugee community, next to housing, food is the most pressing need they face. When refugees have food and housing, they are more likely to send their children to school and to maintain good health—both important factors in the region’s potential for future stability. We chose to operate in Hassakeh province in response to several unique hardships facing Iraqi refugees in the area. First, Hassakeh is primarily a farming province, supported largely by its wheat crops; today, however, it continues to suffer a two-year-long drought that has driven up food prices and made it difficult for neighbors or churches to support those in need. Second, although there are around 7,000 Iraqi refugees registered in Hassakeh, there are few services provided for them (unlike Damascus).

In early May, Communications Specialist Bridgette Auger and Program Director Amelia Reese will be returning to Hassakeh to conduct a post-operational survey consisting of home visits and focus group discussions with Iraqis, and meetings with Afram and George of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in Hassakeh city and Qamishli. Based on the results of this survey, Amelia Reese will refine A Plate for All’s program model to enhance nutritional and demographic targeting—providing the most helpful services for the most needy in the most effective manner possible.

As we continue to deliver food aid and refine our programming, your financial support is critical. You can send your tax-deductible donations to:

A Plate for All
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With many thanks and great anticipation,

Peace/Salaam,

A Plate for All Staff

Amelia Reese, Bridgette Auger and Daniel Masterson.

“The house of hardship has a thousand friends.” –Arab proverb