

A Plate for All

2009 in Review: Food for the Hungry

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Dear Friends,

The holiday season is an ideal time to count your blessings, and we sincerely thank each of you. Your generous assistance has been critical for A Plate for All's development. With every challenge, we have been supported by your commitment to help the hungry.

The upcoming New Year marks the end of A Plate for All's first year of operations. In 2009, A Plate for All completed three rounds of food distribution. Each round served 350 families of Iraqi refugees with about a month's supply of food. These distributions were made possible by the technical and administrative expertise of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, and the time and energy of American, British, and Syrian volunteers in Syria.

Since A Plate for All's first distribution in April 2009, we have surveyed the Iraqi population in northeastern Syria to evaluate its context-specific needs. Each distribution provides us with a valuable opportunity to talk directly to the people we serve. Surprisingly, not all food-aid organizations ask aid recipients what they want. As we learn more about the field of food aid, we have discovered that two of our central principles—1) the local procurement of food and 2) cultural and situational adjustment—are progressive concepts in the provision of international food aid.

At the third distribution, our British colleague Matt Loffman conducted face-to-face interviews with Iraqis. Regrettably, Matt discovered from these interviews that the need for assistance is still great in these communities. Although the news cycle in America has shifted our focus away from Iraq, the Iraqi refugees in Syria still think about their embattled home every day. Just this morning, a bomb exploded in eastern Baghdad, and a string of sectarian assassinations over the weekend left four leaders dead. Many of the Iraqi refugees living in Syria received death threats that prompted them to flee their homes. In the last year, some Iraqis have started to return to Iraq, and tragically, some of those years-old death threats were fulfilled upon their return. These stories haunt the minds of Iraqis living in Syria.

Matt asked everyone he interviewed: "Are your children in school?" Schooling this generation of Iraqis in exile is critical for the future stability of Iraq and the whole region. Unfortunately, more than half of the families Matt surveyed said that their children were not attending school. The parents said that the reasons were primarily the lack of money or health issues.

Food helps. A family with little or no income will buy food before paying for their children to attend school. The family will buy food before paying for the medical care that their child needs. If we provide food for those in need, they can use their limited resources for schooling and medical care for their children, who can then grow up to be productive, educated citizens contributing to a stable and peaceful Middle East.

In our next year, we plan to expand our services and add a nutritional education component. We strive to get Iraqis involved in the aid process. This is a challenge because Iraqis are not legally allowed to work in Syria. We are confident, nonetheless, that we will find some way to engage Iraqis in the process and create a more sustainable project.

Sincerely,
Daniel T. R. Masterson
Executive Director