

Dear Friends and Supporters of A Plate for All,

I have good news! A Plate for All recently carried out a successful food distribution for Iraqi families in Hassakeh, a town in northeastern Syria along the Iraqi border. We targeted families with over five members, single-parent households, and people with disabilities.

Members of our partner organization, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (GOPA), were thoroughly encouraging of our work. They said that by and large, the situation of Iraqi families in this remote region of Syria has not changed. Despite the fact that Iraq is no longer a daily war zone, the majority of refugees—having been traumatized by kidnapping and violence, and threatened with death—say that they will not return to Iraq, according to a UNHCR survey conducted this year. They clearly have good reason. In addition to this fact, refugees in Syria's northeast must cope with a continuing drought, which has even begun to displace local Syrians. The New York Times ran a front-page story this month describing the devastating effects of the drought on the populations in this region (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/14/world/middleeast/14syria.html>).

Though limited funding obliged A Plate for All to reduce the number of families it feeds from 350 to 170, Efram—GOPA's point person in the city of Hassakeh—told us that the situation the refugees face is such that even if all we had to give was a single box of food it would be worth giving.

I would like to give you a picture of the setting we are working in. A Plate for All operates in the cities of Hassakeh and Qamishli, the two largest cities in Syria's northeastern province, between the Iraqi and Turkish borders. Both are dusty, relatively quiet agricultural cities with packed, two or three-story buildings. We are told that the outskirts of these cities were once green, before the drought. There are approximately 1000 Iraqi families living in Qamishli and Hassakeh, so the target population for our food aid is relatively small. None of the refugees is allowed to work in Syria and most have spent the money and assets they carried with them from Iraq. Approximately 750 of these families are Muslim and 250 are Christian. GOPA surveyed this population and only two of these 1000 families responded that they are not in need of food aid.

A Plate for All aims to assist as many of these 1000 families as possible with good quality, traditional Iraqi food delivered quarterly. Refugee families continually call GOPA to ask if they too can be added to the list to receive this food aid. If A Plate for All has resources to cover them, Efram, the GOPA coordinator who receives refugee requests, goes into the neighborhoods and registers new families who fit the criteria. Efram was previously a mechanical engineer trained in Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, but he returned to Hassakeh to help his hometown deal with the effects of the war and drought. He also helps us track our beneficiary pool, because the refugee population is mobile and changes somewhat between distributions.

When A Plate for All staff asked Efram if our program is useful, or if another program would be more useful, he responded: *"Yes. Food—and especially good quality food—is a definite necessity. It is more necessary than anything else at the moment... At this point food is something that we can do well, and we should keep doing it."* And when asked what he sees as the most critical need of the Iraqi population, Efram responded *"Good quality food."*

A Plate for All sees its role in this community as one of support. We seek to identify motivated, capable Syrians (and potentially Iraqis, if possible) and provide resources for them to carry out food security and nutrition-related projects in the community. Effram is just one example of a Syrian who has devoted much of his life to supporting the poor and marginalized in his community. He knows each Iraqi beneficiary family by name, can list the number of children in each family, and is able to talk about each family's history. Not only does Effram provide A Plate for All with information regarding the situation in Hassakeh, but he also offers up his own life advice, reciting a favorite proverb: *"A life without goals is soup."*

A Plate for All's most recent food distribution could not have been more timely. Our distribution fell on September 5<sup>th</sup>, just six days before the end of Ramadan (the Muslim fasting month) and the beginning of a three-day feast called Eid. Because Ramadan came during such a hot, dry season, people needed all the nourishment they could get when they broke their fast at sundown. Additionally, demand during Ramadan inevitably drives food prices up, making it even more difficult for those who could not afford much food to begin with. These factors contributed to the food insecurity among the Iraqi refugee populations, and we witnessed a sense of desperation among those waiting for food. Refugees began to gather two hours before our distribution was scheduled in order to be sure of getting a box. Many came to A Plate for All staff to ask why they were not able to receive a box now, even though they received one before (and the answer, of course, was lack of funds). Still more refugees came at the end of the distribution to see if there were any extra boxes. A Plate for All was the only organization supplying food assistance in this region during the end of Ramadan.

A Plate for All's Communications Director, Bridgette Auger, interviewed several Iraqi men and women on video and found that the consensus was that the need for food is great. She also found that, depending on family size and time of year, our food boxes supply the family for anywhere from 5-15 days (if these are the only items consumed). All agreed that the food was very good quality. Please look for a short video of these interviews by Bridgette Auger in the coming weeks.

Between war, drought, and forced unemployment, these refugees face a difficult situation. Thank you for your continued support of A Plate for All. Please keep us in mind during this upcoming holiday season, and please visit [www.aplateforall.org](http://www.aplateforall.org) if you wish to make a donation.

May peace be with you.

Sincerely,

Amelia

Amelia Reese Masterson  
Program Director  
A Plate for All  
[www.aplateforall.org](http://www.aplateforall.org)  
[areese@aplateforall.org](mailto:areese@aplateforall.org)

