

# #LINK

YOUR ACT FOR PEACE SUPPORTER MAGAZINE

WINTER 2021

## REFUGEES IN JORDAN ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

Helping vulnerable families as the Syrian conflict reaches its 10th year.

## SENDING HOPE TO WOMEN FLEEING CONFLICT IN TIGRAY

Traumatised refugees in Ethiopia receive vital support and care.

## ALMOST THERE

How your gifts are helping Sri Lankan refugees survive the pandemic and return home.

**ACT FOR PEACE**  
CONFRONTING INJUSTICE TOGETHER  
THROUGH THE **actalliance**

The international aid agency of the  
National Council of Churches in Australia

ABN 86 619 970 188

# A DECADE OF SORROW IN SYRIA: SHOWING REFUGEE FAMILIES THEY'RE NOT FORGOTTEN

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Syrian conflict, which has claimed more than half a million lives and forced more than 12 million people from their homes. Even though the Syrian crisis no longer makes our front pages, many families are still being affected by this devastating humanitarian crisis.

They are people like Heba\*. Eight years ago, she escaped the war in Syria by fleeing to Jordan, where she still lives today with her husband and their four children.

Life is hard in Jordan for refugees like Heba and her family. The vast majority live in cities and towns instead of camps, which means they must find a way to pay for things like rent and transportation. But only a limited number of them have work permits, so most of these families still rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs.

The economic crisis unfolding as a result of coronavirus has made a desperate situation even worse.

The impact of lockdowns, loss of livelihoods, price increases and ongoing disruption to aid brought about by the pandemic makes it even more difficult for refugees to survive and is pushing many more towards devastating hunger.

Ten years of shooting and bombing in Syria have forced more than half of the country's population to flee their homes, including 5.6 million refugees who are seeking safety in neighbouring countries and another 6.6 million who are internally displaced inside Syria.

*"I hope for a better life, for a better future than this", Heba says.*

Thanks to supporters like you, our partner on the ground in Jordan, Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR), is ensuring that some of the most vulnerable refugee families in Jordan can access the vital support that they need and deserve.

DSPR has been working with Palestinian refugees since 1949, so they understand the suffering that people go through when they're forced to flee their homes and rebuild their lives.

Through your generous gifts, they're making sure that vulnerable refugees like Heba are now able to access food, health care, and other kinds of support; meaning they can live with increased safety, justice and dignity after enduring so much for so long.

\*Name changed to protect her privacy.

Front cover: Thanks to generous gifts from Ration Challenge participants and supporters like you, a Syrian refugee mother living in Jordan receives a box of urgently needed food rations.

## MARCH APPEAL UPDATE

At a time when Syrian families in Jordan are living without enough basic necessities like food, education, and medical care, you gave generously to our March appeal to help refugees struggling to survive have the support they need.



**over 655** generous gifts.



**\$95,783** raised for families fleeing conflict and violence.

Since Heba's husband lost his job during the pandemic, Heba and her family have struggled to pay rent, put food on the table, and afford expensive medications for their children. The rations they receive from DSPR make it easier to survive during this difficult time.

# CARING KIDS GET FOOD FOR THOUGHT



School students take the Ration Challenge and join thousands of caring Australians sending a powerful message that Syrian refugees in Jordan are not alone or forgotten.

The Syrian conflict is one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. And it's civilians—men, women and children—who are suffering the most.

In Jordan, where 10 per cent of the population are refugees, mothers and fathers are struggling to feed their children; sons and daughters are missing out on an education; people are dying for want of basic medical care that we take for granted.

Though the world's attention may be elsewhere right now, thousands of caring Australians are standing in solidarity with vulnerable families during this humanitarian crisis through the Ration Challenge, including more than a thousand school students who are putting themselves in the shoes of a refugee for one week by living on the same rations as a Syrian in Jordan.

Taking the Ration Challenge was an experience that has given a fresh perspective

to one caring student from Lewisham Christian Brothers High School.

*"I decided to take on the Ration Challenge," he said, "because I really care about the living standards of refugees and am attempting to do what I can through the school to help make their lives easier. The Ration Challenge was a great way for me to do that."*

*"I learnt how hard it was to live on the rations of a refugee for 1 week. I can't imagine how hard it must be for them to do it every day of their lives."*

The experience helps students learn about current global issues, develop empathy for others and feel more empowered to make a difference in the world.

By living on the same rations that struggling Syrians receive in Jordan, these students are joining thousands of individuals across Australia raising money that will provide emergency food, health care and support to people hit hardest by the Syrian conflict; ensuring that struggling families have the care and support they need and deserve.



**6,000**

passionate people signed up to take part this year.



**\$1.26M**

was raised for refugees and other vulnerable communities.



**4,344**

that's enough to feed 4,344 refugees for a year.



This year, students at Lewisham Christian Brothers School are not only taking the Ration Challenge as part of their studies in Food Technology to learn about food equity in our global society, they're also raising money to support Syrian refugees in Jordan and give them hope.

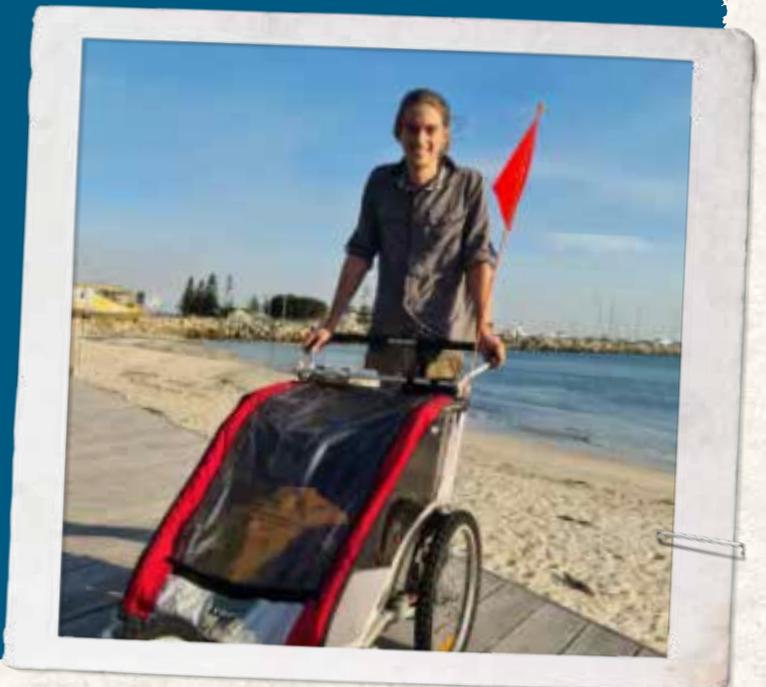
## YOUR ACTION, YOUR IMPACT: GOING THE DISTANCE FOR REFUGEES

Ivor Houston, a 21-year-old from a small town in the Blue Mountains in NSW is making a big difference by walking across Australia to raise money for families fleeing conflict and persecution.

On 8 May, Ivor Houston left Perth and began his 4000k journey to Bondi; it's a journey that he expects will take about six months.

Ivor hopes to raise \$20,000 for Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group (BMRGS) and Act for Peace, a sum that he plans to split equally between the two organisations.

Show your support for Ivor by donating to his fundraiser: [onfootacrossaustralia.com](http://onfootacrossaustralia.com)



As the devastating second wave of coronavirus sweeps through communities in India, people have died at home and in parking lots outside hospitals, which have run out of beds and life-saving oxygen.



# ALMOST THERE: HELPING SRI LANKAN REFUGEES RETURN HOME

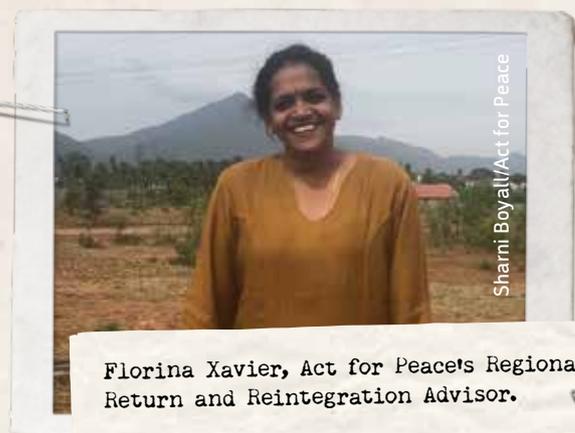
At a time when Sri Lankan families are eager to return home after living in India's refugee camps for as long as 35 years, Act for Peace's partner on the ground, the Organisation for Eelam Refugees' Rehabilitation (OfERR), is providing refugees with support and life-changing solutions.

After fleeing their homeland when the brutal Sri Lankan civil war erupted in 1983, refugee families living in India are still waiting to return home. Although the war has been over since 2009, home is still far from reach for many refugees as they face seemingly insurmountable barriers.

After she recently visited a few camps in India, we spoke with Act for Peace's Regional Return and Reintegration Advisor, Florina Xavier, about the work that our partner, OfERR, is doing to support refugees through the pandemic, prepare them to get home, and help them rebuild their lives once they arrive.

## Florina, please tell us how the second wave of COVID-19 in India affected the camps?

In my home state of Tamil Nadu, almost 60,000 Sri Lankan refugees are living in 107 refugee camps. Families living there are particularly vulnerable to the devastating second wave of COVID-19 in the country, as it is impossible to practice social distancing in cramped and overcrowded camps. Thankfully, as a trusted provider of medical support in the camps, OfERR are providing refugee families with vital food supplies, medicine, oxygen, and



Sharmi Boyal/Act for Peace

Florina Xavier, Act for Peace's Regional Return and Reintegration Advisor.

protective clothing; helping them feel safe and supported without having to travel to overburdened hospitals and the pandemic-stricken cities. For refugees who wish to finally return home, the situation has been particularly tough as the pandemic has added uncertainty about when this will be possible.

## What other barriers to getting home are Sri Lankan refugees facing in India?

While there has been a big increase in interest from refugees to return to Sri Lanka during COVID-19, refugees remain reluctant to leave the camps because they are unsure of what the future holds for them back home. They are afraid it won't be the home they once knew; that they won't be able find shelter or a job to support their families.

Another major hurdle is that many refugees don't

have the legal documents needed to travel or access important services, like banks. Sri Lankans who fled the civil war by escaping on crowded boats often left with almost no belongings, including documents like their birth certificates. These families, as well as those who were born in India, face complicated administrative processes to attain critical identity documents and it isn't always easy accessing the support needed to overcome these barriers from inside the camps.

### **What is our partner, OfERR, doing to help them overcome these challenges?**

Gifts from generous supporters in Australia are helping OfERR stand with Sri Lankan refugees every step of the way. By educating Sri Lankan families about what to expect when they return home, OfERR is giving families the assistance, information and confidence needed to return home. They're helping refugees access the important identity documents required to rebuild their lives, like birth certificates. And once refugees step back onto Sri Lankan soil, OfERR is helping some of the most vulnerable families access safe water, shelter and livelihood support, like grants that refugees can use to start businesses. For many of these most vulnerable families, especially at this time of pandemic, this support is life-changing because it gives them both the power to return home and a sense of control over their lives.

### **Finally, please tell us about the "I'm Prepared" program that Act for Peace has been working on with OfERR?**

In March, the "I'm Prepared" program came to a successful completion. The program focused on building knowledge, enhancing



Florina Xavier/Act for Peace

At a time when the pandemic is destroying lives and livelihoods in India, OfERR are doing all they can to protect Sri Lankan refugee families living in 107 refugee camps across Tamil Nadu; where cramped living conditions put vulnerable families at heightened risk of infection.

preparedness and supporting women's livelihoods. Too often refugees in general – and refugee women in particular – are excluded from key decision-making processes when returning and reintegrating into their home country, which reduces their power by undermining their roles as leaders in their local communities. But, through this program, refugee women in India increased their learning about the importance of child and women safety and how to access services or support. They learned about the steps they need to take before returning home, were trained how to identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of members in their own community and gained vital support through women's livelihoods programs. I'm very proud that OfERR has made it possible for so many refugees to achieve their full social, economic and political rights, by empowering them to be more active when deciding where to live, now and in the future.

## **RESPONDING TO INDIA'S COVID-19 EMERGENCY APPEAL**

More than \$100,000 has been raised so that refugee families have the vital support and resources needed to survive India's devastating second wave of COVID-19. Here's how your generous gifts are helping:



Personal protective equipment for medical staff across 107 camps so they can safely deliver health services and supplies.



Medicines for chronically ill patients in the camps so they don't have to visit overwhelmed hospitals.



Food supplies to help refugees with COVID-19 to self-isolate within their community to stop the spread.



Oxygen monitoring machines for the camps so they can safely monitor oxygen levels, helping to lift the burden on the health system.

# SENDING HOPE TO REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA

As alarming reports of violence inflicted on civilians, particularly Eritrean refugees, emerged, generous supporters like you stepped up to support those living through this horror.

In November 2020, conflict broke out in Ethiopia's Tigray region. A rapid escalation of violence followed between the Ethiopian central government and the forces of the Tigray regional government, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

Since then, thousands of people have lost their lives, families caught in the crossfire have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety, and two refugee camps in Tigray were destroyed and are now permanently closed; leaving already struggling refugees homeless and without access to aid or safety.

A news blackout denied the world access to the true scale of the crisis as it unfolded. But alarming reports emerged that the federal government was blocking most humanitarian aid from reaching civilians and refugees caught up in the fighting in Ethiopia's northern Tigray province.



An Eritrean refugee woman looks on as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) distributes food items at Mai Aini Refugee camp, in Ethiopia, on January 30, 2021.

Exhausted, traumatised, and wasted from starvation, many who had escaped the shooting and bombing fled to South Sudan, while others sought refuge within Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa; including women and girls who had defied the odds by surviving sexual violence, rape, and attempted killings.

## CARING FOR REFUGEES WITH URGENT NEEDS

At a time when refugees in Ethiopia needed safety and basic necessities, our local partner was on the ground supporting refugees with urgent needs.

Our partner works with some of Ethiopia's most vulnerable refugees, providing vital medical services to the injured and chronically ill; psycho-social support to those who have lived through unimaginable trauma; and vocational training to survivors who need to build their confidence.

In March, supporters like you responded generously to our "Parcels of Hope" crowdfunder and raised more than \$56,000; ensuring that our partner was able to provide refugees with the locally-sourced basic items needed to be safe and preserve a sense of dignity - soap, sanitary pads, face masks, hand



Our local partner in Ethiopia provides support to refugees living with chronic conditions, who are unable to access vital health services in rural camps. They assist with medical expenses, emergency transport, dietary supplements, temporary shelter, and vocational training.

sanitiser and clean water.

These vital items not only helped girls and women manage their periods in dignity and privacy, protect themselves from the pandemic, and simply wash their clothes; they also offered much needed emotional support by showing there are people on the other side of the world who care.

## STANDING UP FOR FAMILIES FLEEING CONFLICT

Currently home to more than 800,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, Ethiopia has a proud history of providing asylum to people fleeing conflict and persecution. Yet as the fighting and shooting escalated, disturbing reports emerged. Refugees who had found their way to relative safety in Addis Ababa were at risk of being returned back to the conflict zone in Tigray against their will.

To protect families fleeing the fighting and

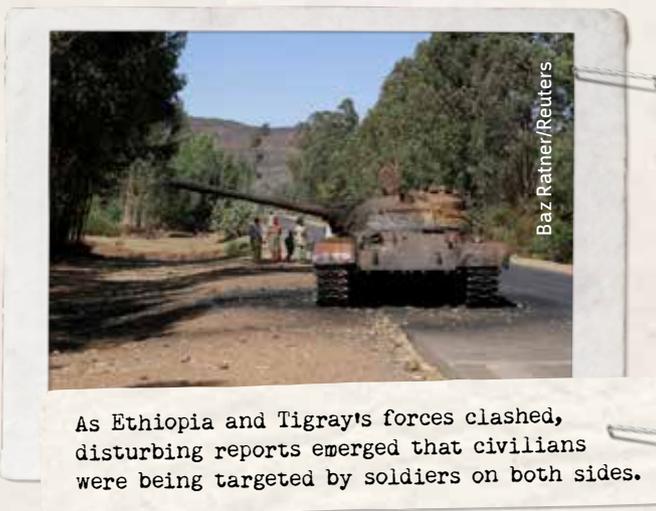


Generous gifts from supporters like you ensured that war-ravaged survivors have access to sanitary pads, face masks, soap and hand sanitiser; meaning girls and women can manage their periods, protect themselves from the pandemic, and wash their clothes.

insecurity in Tigray, caring Australians stood with refugees in Ethiopia by signing our petition to call on the Ethiopian Government to continue its long-standing commitment to protecting Eritrean refugees sheltering in Ethiopia.

Almost 500 people asked the Ethiopian Government to allow Eritrean refugees to stay in Addis Ababa, rather than being returned to Tigray, and also to authorise UNHCR and other NGOs to provide assistance to refugees in Addis Ababa.

Even though supporters like you stepped up to help refugees during this crisis, the conflict in Ethiopia is complicated and ongoing, with no easy solutions in sight. That's why our partner in Addis Ababa needs ongoing support. Together we must continue supporting the safety, justice and dignity of refugees with urgent needs.



As Ethiopia and Tigray's forces clashed, disturbing reports emerged that civilians were being targeted by soldiers on both sides.

## YOUR ACTION, YOUR IMPACT:

Act for Peace supporters like you sent heart-warming messages to support refugees caught up in this humanitarian crisis.

"We in Australia are thinking of you. Stay Strong." — Jan

"I hope this box will help you a little bit. I send you my love." — Serena

"I hope this helps in a small way. Keep hoping for a better life." — Ben

"You deserve this small dignity, and so much more." — Anonymous

"You are strong and you are loved. Stay safe." — Charlie

"Someone cares!" — Sharon

Through the 'Pass-on-a-gift' program run by our partner in Zimbabwe, Christian Care, Tinashe now has more freedom and the opportunity to earn a livelihood.

## A STORY OF A BOY, A GOAT, AND A BICYCLE

### What would a new bike mean to you?

Another way to get around, something fun to do on the weekends, or maybe it's one of those impulse purchases that ends up collecting dust in the garage...

Or maybe, like for Tinashe, it changes everything.

A little while ago, Tinashe was gifted a goat. Now, you might be wondering what a goat has to do with a new bike, but stay with us.

Tinashe was given this goat as part of the 'Pass-on-a-Gift' program run by our partner, Christian Care, in Zimbabwe. The program works with people living with a disability in target villages and provides training to improve income generation. With your support, participants can earn their own

money, meaning they can make a real contribution to their household.

Tinashe was born with clubfoot, which makes most kinds of work far too painful for him. But now, he's learned the skills to look after and breed his own goats.

He's gotten so good at it that now he cares for all the goats in his village.

*"After my training," he says, "I am trusted with this task now. I take them to pastures and make sure they return safely."*

With the money he's made from selling the offspring, Tinashe has bought himself a new bike. For a teenage boy who used to stay at home because walking long distances proved too painful, this new bike is much more than just a way for him to get around.

It's given him something invaluable: his freedom.

Freedom to go into town and school, to see his friends, like every teenage boy should.

It's these stories that show the importance of our partners' work. Something that can seem quite trivial to one person can be life changing for another.

# YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'TIL IT'S GONE

The saying goes that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone. For some of us, this could be because we don't like to think about losing the things we have.

Like a job, for instance.

Complaining about work is something most of us have done. How busy and tired it makes us. How many other things we'd prefer to be doing with our time...

Then COVID-19 hit.

Hours were cut back, people had to work from home, and some businesses stopped altogether. As unemployment hit record highs, many people suddenly found themselves faced with the scary reality of losing their livelihoods.

As restrictions eased and things slowly returned to normal in Australia last year, it was easy to slip into old habits. Yet, many Rohingya refugees living in the overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, have been living without job opportunities for the last three years.

As stateless individuals, they don't have the legal rights and protection we take for granted. Day in, day out, they live with restrictions on what they can and can't do in society.

That's why our partner on the ground, Christian Aid, are so passionate about their livelihood training program.

Getting a program like this off the ground starts and ends with the communities: seeing what people are interested in doing,



Richard Wainwright/Act for Peace

As job opportunities are limited for many Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh, our local partner, Christian Aid, are running a livelihoods training program that will help refugees put food on the table and begin rebuilding their lives.

conducting market assessments, and training refugees in the practical and emotional skills needed to set up and run businesses.

As our Act for Peace program coordinator, Will Gray, describes:

*"If you just come in and start delivering and rolling out a program without talking to the community about what it is, what they want, and how best to meet their needs, then you can end up doing more harm than good. The skills training is all based on what the community decides."*

After months of engaging with refugee and host communities, Christian Aid are ready to deliver skills training that will mean refugees can start businesses and possibly access jobs, allowing them to provide for their families and live with dignity in the most difficult of circumstances. With camps across Cox's Bazar currently in COVID-19 lockdowns, however, roll out of the program is paused until a sense of normalcy returns.

Thanks to your gifts and with the support of the Australian Government through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP), this work is possible. And as we report this exciting news back to you, incredibly passionate, considered, local leaders are supporting refugee families with the training and skills needed to rebuild their lives.



Joel Pratley/Act for Peace

# Help create a future filled with God's love

As a Christian, Rev. Frank Byatt believed he had a responsibility to share his good fortune with our brothers and sisters in urgent need around the world.

That's why, on Christmas Day in 1949, he put a Bowl of Remembrance on the dinner table and asked his family to place a generous gift in it to 'share your good dinner with hungry children in other lands.'

Throughout our lives tens of thousands of us have followed in Frank's example; sharing God's love with those in urgent need around the world, through gifts to the Christmas Bowl.

Your Will is an opportunity to continue this important legacy long into the future; helping to create a future filled with God's love.

**To find out how to include the Christmas Bowl in your Will, please call Andy on 1800 025 101 or visit [www.actforpeace.org.au/giftinwill](http://www.actforpeace.org.au/giftinwill)**

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