

WE LINK

YOUR ACT FOR PEACE SUPPORTER MAGAZINE

WINTER 2023

UNITING FOR SYRIA AND TÜRKIYE

Together we have raised over \$500,000 to support people displaced by the recent earthquakes.

VANUATU'S EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN ACTION

How long-term planning supported those impacted by the recent twin cyclones.

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CLIMATE IN ZIMBABWE

Ensuring no one is left behind as communities adapt to climate change.

'FORSA' IS PROVIDING HOPE

Helping Syrian and Palestinian refugees find a place to belong.

ACT FOR PEACE

CONFRONTING INJUSTICE TOGETHER
THROUGH THE **actalliance**

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

ABN 86 619 970 188



ACT Alliance members on the ground have been responding rapidly to support Syrians impacted by the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake.

EMERGENCY UPDATE

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES IN SYRIA IN THE WAKE OF A “DOUBLE CRISIS”

In February of this year, the world watched in horror as two massive earthquakes struck central Türkiye and northern Syria. The disaster, which claimed thousands of lives and caused widespread destruction, required a swift and comprehensive humanitarian response. As the impact continues to be felt almost six months later, we’re working with ACT Alliance members on the ground to rebuild lives where the need is greatest.

Cover image: Amelia lives with her three children in the Bikita region of Zimbabwe. When Amelia was young, she remembers the bumper harvests, now there is nothing. Because of your support, Amelia received training from Christian Care on climate resilient agriculture. This has helped improve Ameliats crops, in turn increasing her ability to make an income. Read more about Christian Care's work on p. 6.

For many people in northern Syria already displaced by the civil war and struggling to survive through economic collapse, the scale of the disaster has been unimaginable. With thousands killed and many more left homeless, the widespread damage caused against a backdrop of tremendous unrest has been dubbed a “double crisis”.

Recent updates estimate that more than 350,000 people have been displaced. In Syria, over 5,900 people were killed and 11,200 injured. With the healthcare system at breaking point, many have still not been able to receive the level of healthcare they need. There is also an urgent need for additional resources to make sure that women and children are protected from gender-based violence and other safety risks.

The impact on infrastructure has also been devastating. More than 2,260 buildings were destroyed, and a further 32,000 sustained significant damage. Extensive damage to local roads and bridges has affected the population's ability to access essential water and sanitation and continues to prevent many people from accessing critical services and employment.

In the wake of this crisis, you responded with love to provide urgent relief to those facing unimaginable suffering. Our recent emergency appeal has raised more than \$540,000 to help our partners on the ground provide direct support to rebuild lives and communities.

This generosity has allowed our partners through the ACT Alliance to distribute urgently needed meals, food kits, hygiene and dignity kits, as well as medical supplies to hospitals and shelters, and to organise rapid mental health and psychosocial support.

ACT Alliance member Christian Aid is working across all emergency response areas, prioritising those in most urgent need – for example, children who have lost their parents and people who are chronically ill. They have established child-friendly spaces to provide psychological first aid, family tracing and reunification, and ongoing care and referrals for children who have lost their home and their family.

Together, we are supporting people to live in safety and with dignity while displaced, ensuring they can access the critical physical and emotional support they need in moments like these.

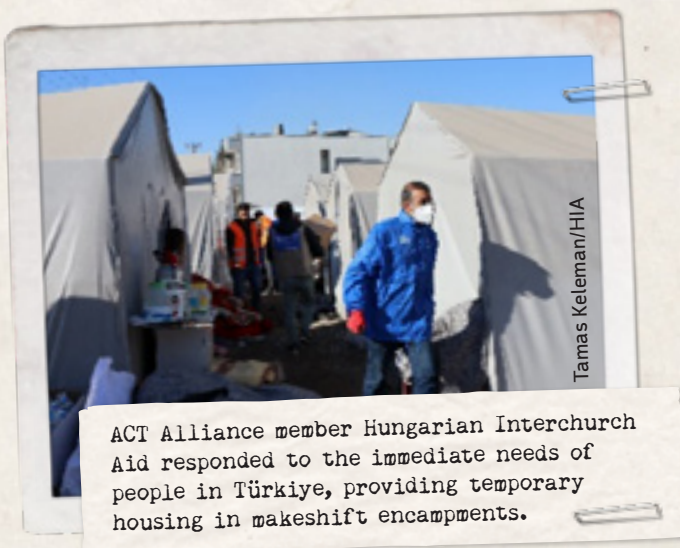
Christian Aid is also progressively assessing schools to determine what needs to be done to repair and equip them so that formal education can resume as soon as possible. Meanwhile, they are working together to distribute school kits and run non-formal education programs, including remedial classes and recreation activities.

While it is concerning that the number of child labour cases and children dropping out of school has increased since the disaster, thanks to the efforts of ACT Alliance members on the ground, at least 2,299 lightly damaged schools – around 78 per cent – have reopened. Attendance rates are nearing 95 per cent on average in the Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama, Homs and Idleb Governorates.

Thank you for standing with people in Syria and Türkiye. Through your support, they can rebuild their lives in the face of unimaginable suffering.

YOUR SUPPORT IS PROVIDING:

- **Lifesaving assistance** through the distribution of hot meals, clean water and hygiene kits
- **Vital medical care** such as ambulance services, medicine and first aid supplies
- **Critical emotional and psychosocial support**, including counselling, family reunification and psychological first aid
- **Essential resources** to assess, rehabilitate and repair local infrastructure, including schools, roads and bakeries



ACT Alliance member Hungarian Interchurch Aid responded to the immediate needs of people in Türkiye, providing temporary housing in makeshift encampments.

HOW BEING PREPARED FOR DISASTERS HELPED FAMILIES IN VANUATU

When twin cyclones Judy and Kevin hit Vanuatu in early March, they caused widespread destruction and left the country in a state of emergency. Thanks to your support of our long-term project preparing communities for natural disaster, our local partner the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) was ready to respond to the immediate needs of affected communities.

Andrew and Anna's family were displaced from their home in Vanuatu's Ohlen Mataso by Cyclone Judy. Anna, her children and parents took shelter in a nearby cave after the roofing of their home was ripped off. The cyclone also destroyed the family's garden, which they relied on to grow local crops like banana, manioc, and cabbage.

"We saw the hurricane coming and thought we could stay, but it was too strong," Andrew remembered. "If we stayed at home, we could have died. So, we moved the family to a nearby cave to be safe. I stayed with the other men and watched as the cyclone blew our homes away."

Cyclone Judy was the first of a rare double cyclone that hit Vanuatu in 2023. Around 80 per cent of Vanuatu's population was affected by the cyclones, and the entire country entered a state of emergency on the 5th of March. With many homes either destroyed or flooded, thousands of families suddenly found themselves in urgent need of electricity, shelter, food, and clean water.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, our emergency appeal raised over \$27,357. Act for Peace's in-country staff supported our local partner VCC with the initial emergency response coordination and communication, including liaising with VCC member churches.

Together they distributed food, shelter kits, hygiene kits and jerry cans to community members who had been forced to flee their homes and take shelter in evacuation centres. They also carried out community assessments to determine how many people would need equipment and training to repair their homes and plant climate-resilient crops to future-proof their livelihoods.

Anna's mother, Andrew and Anna sit under a makeshift tarpaulin shelter in the place where their homes once stood.



"Thank you so much to VCC for supporting us to rebuild our homes." – Andrew



Members of the VCC Interim Disaster Committee and Act for Peace Program Coordinator, Sarah Doyle, responded to the immediate needs of the community.

Meanwhile, the Vanuatu Mobile Force rescued Anna and her family from the cave and took them to one of the VCC evacuation centres. VCC was able to assist Andrew and Anna and five other families from the same area to get back on their feet. They provided emergency roofing kits that included iron sheeting and nails that they used to repair their homes to a standard safe enough for them to return.

“We needed to rebuild our homes, to replace the roofing and posts so that we can live safely,” said Andrew. “We hope that we can build a stronger home, made of cement so we are better prepared for the next cyclone.”

For more than 10 years, Act for Peace has worked in partnership with VCC, helping communities in Vanuatu prepare for disasters like the one they are still recovering from today. As well as their amazing emergency response, our partner has provided lifesaving evacuation training, established disaster response plans and set up disaster response committees.

Thank you for supporting our long-term projects in countries like Vanuatu, together with Disaster READY which is supported by the Australian Government and implemented through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership. Because of you, our local partners can prepare communities for emergencies and make a big difference in the immediate aftermath when natural disasters strike.

YOU HELPED OUR LOCAL PARTNER IN VANUATU:

- **Distribute food, shelter kits, hygiene kits and jerry cans** to displaced families at VCC Evacuation Centres
- **Provide rapid repair roofing kits** for 11 evacuated families whose homes were destroyed
- **Provide ongoing support to affected communities**, focusing on food security and livelihoods, gender protection and sanitation.

A YOUNG GIRL AND HER FAMILY FIND HOPE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Our partner Christian Care is training communities in Zimbabwe in climate resilient agriculture, helping them build resilience to the impacts of climate change and reduce the chance of climate-induced displacement. For Fiona* and her family, this project has given them the resources to cope with the challenges of her disability and build sustainable employment for the future.

Four-year-old Fiona is as energetic as any child her age. However, a terrible accident as a baby meant that one of her legs did not grow properly, making it hard for her to run around or walk to school.

Fiona's parents care for their family and attend to Fiona's needs in the Zaka District of Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. Here, a growing number of people are forced to flee their homes as the region experiences the devastating effects of climate change year after year. There's not enough suitable grazing land and vegetation to support livestock production in this drought-ravaged country, so jobs are hard to come by.

With your support, our local partner Christian Care is helping communities in the Zaka, and more recently, Bikita district of Masvingo province adapt to the changing weather patterns. Through the Climate Resilience Agriculture project, they're giving farmers the tools they need to provide food and financial security for future generations. This is helping families to stay together, as they no longer have to separate in search of work in other regions or countries.

Fiona's family receives extra support from Christian Care, as they recognise the additional demands on families who are supporting loved ones who are living with a disability. They received two goats and small livestock training to improve their income opportunities so they could better support Fiona's needs. Since then, two goats have become eight.

"We only owned one goat before and depended on casual labour in exchange for food. Now we know how to care for and raise goats, and their successful breeding means that we have goats to sell when we are under pressure. I feel relieved and happy that we are able to buy the things we need to support our family and feel less vulnerable", said Fiona's mother.



Christian Care

Fiona* with one of the family's goats, which help provide an income for the family.



Christian Care

Fiona* and her parents can more easily participate in the community, now that they are able to earn a sustainable income and Fiona can go to school.

Our partner also helped Fiona gain access to essential support from a local rehabilitation centre to provide the care she needs for her disability, including special shoes that have enabled her to walk more easily. It's uplifting to see the joy Fiona's community shares with her as she discovers the freedom to walk to school, and her confidence flourishes now that she can finally participate in activities with other children her age.

Because of your generosity and the support of the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), our local partner is working closely with communities to give children like Fiona a safe place to belong. Thank you for helping to make this project possible.

**Name changed for safety reasons*

UNITED WE STAND: FUTURE-PROOFING COMMUNITIES AGAINST NATURAL DISASTERS

Indonesia is already one of the most disaster-prone countries on Earth, and now climate change is having an even greater impact on communities. Together with our partner, Church World Service (CWS) in Indonesia, we are working with local farmers to help them future proof their homes and livelihoods against inevitable disasters.

For farming families reliant on agriculture as their primary source of food and income, unpredictable and extreme weather events, like flash flooding, can decimate crops and businesses.

In the last two decades, Indar, a Senior Project Officer at CWS in Indonesia has witnessed the devastating impact of climate change on Indonesia's Central Sulawesi farming communities – whose homes and livelihoods are at greatest risk – more times than she'd care to remember.

"Bulubete village is one where flooding occurs almost every year", Indar tells us.

"Dry seasons and irregular rainy seasons, changes in the amount of rain – it's difficult and less predictable than before."

As Indar knows all too well, natural disasters not only destroy land, livelihoods and businesses but cause widespread displacement. They force farmers, local business owners and their families to go elsewhere to find somewhere safe to live and alternative ways of making a living.

"Often, floods bring malaria and pollute the agricultural land so that people cannot use it for agriculture. When this occurs, people who lose their land eventually look for other jobs in the city to support their families."

Act for Peace are working in partnership with CWS in Indonesia to develop the Disaster Resilience through Enhanced Adaptive Measures (DREAM) program to support rural central Sulawesi communities to prepare for inevitable disaster. The project educates communities about resilient farming practices and empowers women to create future-proof businesses. Local project teams also work alongside communities to design disaster preparedness and emergency response plans, with a focus on disability inclusion to ensure no one is left behind when disasters strike.



Indar harvesting peanuts in the demonstration plot as part of the DREAM project. This area was covered by sand after the previous flash flood. Organic fertilizer, tools, and seeds provided by CWS and Act for Peace are being used to help recover the land.



As a farmer, Eko has learnt about the impacts of climate change and, through the DREAM project, how farmers can adapt their approaches.

The work Indar and her team are doing within communities has given farmers a greater understanding of the impacts of climate change and greater confidence and knowledge to adapt their farming practices to cope with the increasingly unpredictable climate.

Geoff Robinson, Head of Partnerships and Program Impact (acting) at Act for Peace, visited the program recently, and saw firsthand the extraordinary impact of your support.

“While in Indonesia, I was really impressed by how much the DREAM program had achieved in just 12 months. The impact that it had on people’s lives, particularly people living with disability, and the strength of both the farming and women’s Savings and Loans Groups was obvious and inspirational.”

“DREAM is a program that stands out as one of the most truly impactful examples of a community development approach to disaster risk reduction that I have seen in more than 20 years of working in this area.”

With your support and the help of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), the DREAM project is educating communities with new farming and livelihood skills so they can continue to earn an income and implement disaster preparedness planning to respond better when disasters strike.

Thank you for supporting programs like DREAM. Your generosity is making a tangible and lasting difference in people’s lives, giving them the resources and training they deserve and helping communities to build resilience to the changing climate.

STANDING TOGETHER FOR COLLECTIVE INFLUENCE

Against a backdrop of skyrocketing global hunger, mass displacement and climate-fuelled disasters – all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia’s latest Federal Budget aid commitment hit a historical low. Now more than ever, we must invest in long-term humanitarian assistance to improve the livelihoods of the communities at greatest risk.

Despite a previous \$960 million aid commitment in the Pacific and \$470 million in South East Asia made by the Australian Government in October 2022, the latest Federal Budget follows a ten-year trend of declining humanitarian aid budgets.

Although nearly 60% of Australians now support our public international aid efforts¹, this historically low aid budget positions Australia as one of the least generous OECD countries.

Emergency response funding has only marginally increased from \$470 million to \$479 million, which is less than half of what would be considered Australia’s ‘fair share’². Moreover, the seventh successive offshore detention and processing budget blowout brings the cumulative cost to \$9.65 billion since July 2013², taking crucial resources away from other urgent strategic humanitarian aid initiatives.

There have been some positive developments, though. A \$30 million funding boost for DFAT’s international diplomatic and development efforts, and the healthy increase in support for South East Asia, with a doubling of funds for Myanmar, are warmly welcomed. Here at Act for Peace, we’ve been advocating strongly for greater action on the global

displacement crisis and look forward to seeing our recommendations outlined in the government’s five-year International Development Policy, set for publication in June 2023.

With allies such as the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and committed supporters like you, we will continue to fight for a radically different, permanent, and long-term response to the global displacement crisis. Forming broad networks and standing alongside our partners on the ground, and communities themselves for collective influence. We will steadfastly advocate for a commitment to aid funding growth from the Australian Government to more accurately reflect the growing human need, instability and changing regional geostrategic environment.

Thank you for your unwavering support,

James Thomson
Senior Policy and Protection Advisor,
Act for Peace



¹Peace must remain central to Australia’s defence purpose: aid sector, Australian Council for International Development, (2023), <https://acfid.asn.au/peace-must-remain-central-to-australias-defence-purpose-aid-sector/>

²2023-24 Federal Budget Analysis: Facts and Figures, Australian Council for International Development, (2023), <https://acfid.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ACFID-Budget-Analysis-2023-24.pdf>

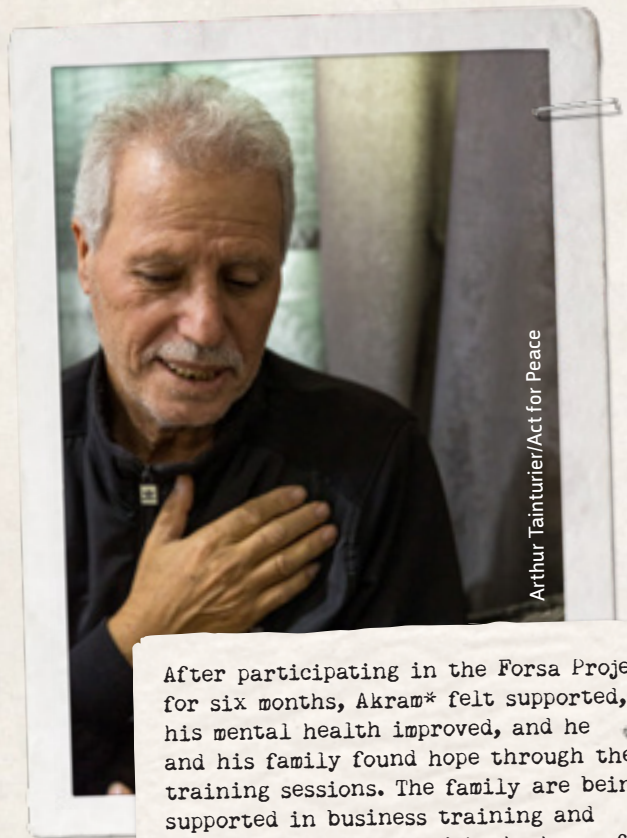
RESTORING BELONGING FOR REFUGEES

In the summer edition of *The Link* magazine, we told you about an exciting project pilot called 'Forsa' that was launched with the aim of helping refugee families in Jordan out of poverty. A year later, the pilot has become a successful project, and more families are benefiting from the "graduation approach" that supports self-reliant livelihoods.

Hana*, Akram* and their three boys fled their home and the war in Syria in 2013, not knowing where they were going or when they might return. Arriving in Jordan, they were safe, but their lives would never be the same.

Last year, our local partner in Jordan, the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR), invited the couple to be part of the *Forsa – Pathway Out Of Poverty For Syrian And Palestinian Refugees – Project Forsa*, which means opportunity in Arabic, is supporting Syrian and Palestinian refugees on a systematic pathway out of poverty and towards self-reliance by the time they graduate around 20 months later.

"My brother Hakem and Safaa [from the Forsa team] called me to visit us. They started to explain about the project, and I couldn't believe they really wanted to help us. Their words revived me. They were discussing the sickness, problems and money debts that I was in. I was wondering if that was dream. They stayed for a long time till I felt with love and compassion between us."



After participating in the Forsa Project for six months, Akram felt supported, his mental health improved, and he and his family found hope through the training sessions. The family are being supported in business training and will open a business with the hope of supporting themselves into the future.*

This innovative project was made possible due to funds raised through the Act for Peace Ration Challenge alongside a contribution from the Australian Government's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

And it's carefully tailored combination of support, including medical, rent, bills, food, education, business training and wellness assistance means that Hana and Akram's family are on a journey to healing and standing on their own again.

"It's amazing what can happen in people's lives in such a short period of time," said Act for Peace International Programs Manager Sharon. *"And it's so heartening to see the hope that people have once they feel that they're actually able to make progress after years and years of feeling oppressed by their situation."*

No matter where someone is in their life, with the right support, they can find their safe place to belong. Thank you for being part of that support system for the millions of displaced families around the world.

**Names have been changed for safety reasons.*

In Zimbabwe, Precious and her son now have a home and a community, after being displaced by Cyclone Idai.



Tobin Jones/Act for Peace

THE DIFFERENCE YOU CAN MAKE

A gift in Will is much more than just a monetary gift.

As a Christian, Rev. Frank Byatt believed he had a responsibility to share what he had 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 Frank's example, sharing God's love with those in urgent need around the world, through our gifts to the Christmas Bowl.

No matter how long you have been giving, you are part of an incredible legacy that has given so much to the world for almost 75 years.

Making or changing your will to include a gift to Act for Peace could be as simple as contacting your legal advisor and they will do all the important work for you. Alternatively, you could use an online option to create a simple will. We've partnered with Gathered Here, an online wills and estates law firm, who host a free and easy step-by-step online will writing service which takes less than 10 minutes. Scan the QR code to find out more.

For a confidential conversation, please contact Stephanie Lenert on **0400 114 990** or **SLenert@actforpeace.org.au** or visit **<https://afp.org.au/make-a-will>** for more information.



Andy Corkill/Act for Peace

"Leaving a gift [in our Will] just seemed like a natural extension of our faith - to go one step further."

- Clive and Gail Ayre.



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AHP

Disaster READY

Our project in Vanuatu is supported by Disaster READY.