



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

DIAKONIA DEPARTMENT- SERVICE IN DIGNITY

Rescue Syria Update - 8

February 23th 2023



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The Middle East Council of Churches

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A Lost Childhood

The worst memory that can accompany a child towards adolescence, youth years, and even old age, is the scene of death and destruction. So how if all this was happening in her or his country?

The children of Aleppo, Lattakia, Hama and Idlib were sleeping safely in their beds with their parental warmth, when the devastating earthquake struck Syria. It stole from them warmth and comfort, and made them found themselves outside their homes, in the streets, where rain was falling on their heads. Before realizing what happened, they were screaming and crying, and trying to search for a father or mother, or even a whole family lost in the rubble.

Some of the children were born in the war and died in the earthquake, without living a happy childhood or a beautiful life in a country that was hit by successive crises, disasters and epidemics. A country in which people sought to survive their days instead of living happily as other people of the world.

Today, the children of the earthquake-affected areas live in harsh humanitarian conditions. Some of them reside in schools that have suddenly turned into shelters which are not equipped with the most basic necessary needs to live in dignity. As well as, others found themselves living in a tent that could hardly resist the winter winds and rains. The needs of people of the stricken areas are increasing daily. They are in dire need of humanitarian aid that would reduce their pain and help them cope with loss. All the earthquake's survivors and those who got out from under the rubble have turned into new displaced persons, facing the harsh living conditions. They lost their sources of livelihood and income after the earthquake destroyed their homes.



Highlights

A magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck southern Turkey about 8 p.m. local time Monday 20 February, near its shared border with northern Syria. The quake, centered in Turkey's Hatay province, was also heavily felt in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous and Damascus. People took immediately to the streets where they spent the night once again. Families who were contemplating returning back to their homes are now returning back to collective shelters. Levels of distress are high, and humanitarian partners are on the ground assisting affected families, including by providing psychosocial support, and also assessing new damages.¹

The earthquakes and aftershocks have created a disaster of colossal proportions and casualty numbers keep climbing. In Syria, at least 5,914 people have reportedly been killed and around 11,000 injured. The earthquake and aftershocks have caused widespread destruction across Syria, with a death toll of over 1,414 deaths and 2,357 injuries in government-controlled areas.²

In NWS, Over 4,500 deaths and 8,300 injuries have been reported according to the Health cluster, mainly in the districts of Harim, Afrin and Jebel Saman, with numbers expected to rise. The earthquakes have affected at least 96 communities and 35 sub-districts in NWS; more than 9,000 buildings have been partially or completely destroyed and over 11,000 people have become homeless.³

Many homes and basic service infrastructure have been destroyed or damaged. More than 8.8 million people – including 3.7 million children – have been affected and many are now in urgent need of food, water, shelter, and emergency medical and psychosocial assistance. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 individuals are taking shelter in reception centres. Ongoing winter season with below freezing temperatures, preexisting large-scale needs and damaged social service infrastructure are exacerbating the severity of humanitarian needs. The recent cholera outbreak alongside significant shortages in electricity, water and fuel, within an overall context of economic crisis after 12 years of protracted crisis have all impacted the situation.⁴

While an increasing number of displacements have been recorded in earthquake-affected areas in Syria, water and sanitation infrastructure has faced extensive damage in all affected areas. Water supply and sewage networks have been damaged and disrupted, increasing the possibility of cross-contamination during times of no pumping and causing losses in the much-needed potable water. Several elevated water tanks, used to guarantee the needed water pressure in the network, were either completely collapsed or heavily damaged.

Many schools that had been temporarily used as collective shelters are being restored to their original function, as other venues are gradually being identified and converted into collective shelters for families who cannot return to their homes.⁵

[1] UNHCR Syria Emergency Response to the Earthquake: Flash Update #12, 21 Feb

[2] MOH, 14 Feb

[3] North-West Syria Flash Update #2 Emergency Response to Earthquake, 20 February 2022

[4] Unicef, Earthquake Response in Syria Humanitarian Situation Report

[5] UNHCR Syria Emergency Response to the Earthquake: Flash Update #12, 21 Feb

01 Aleppo Governorate

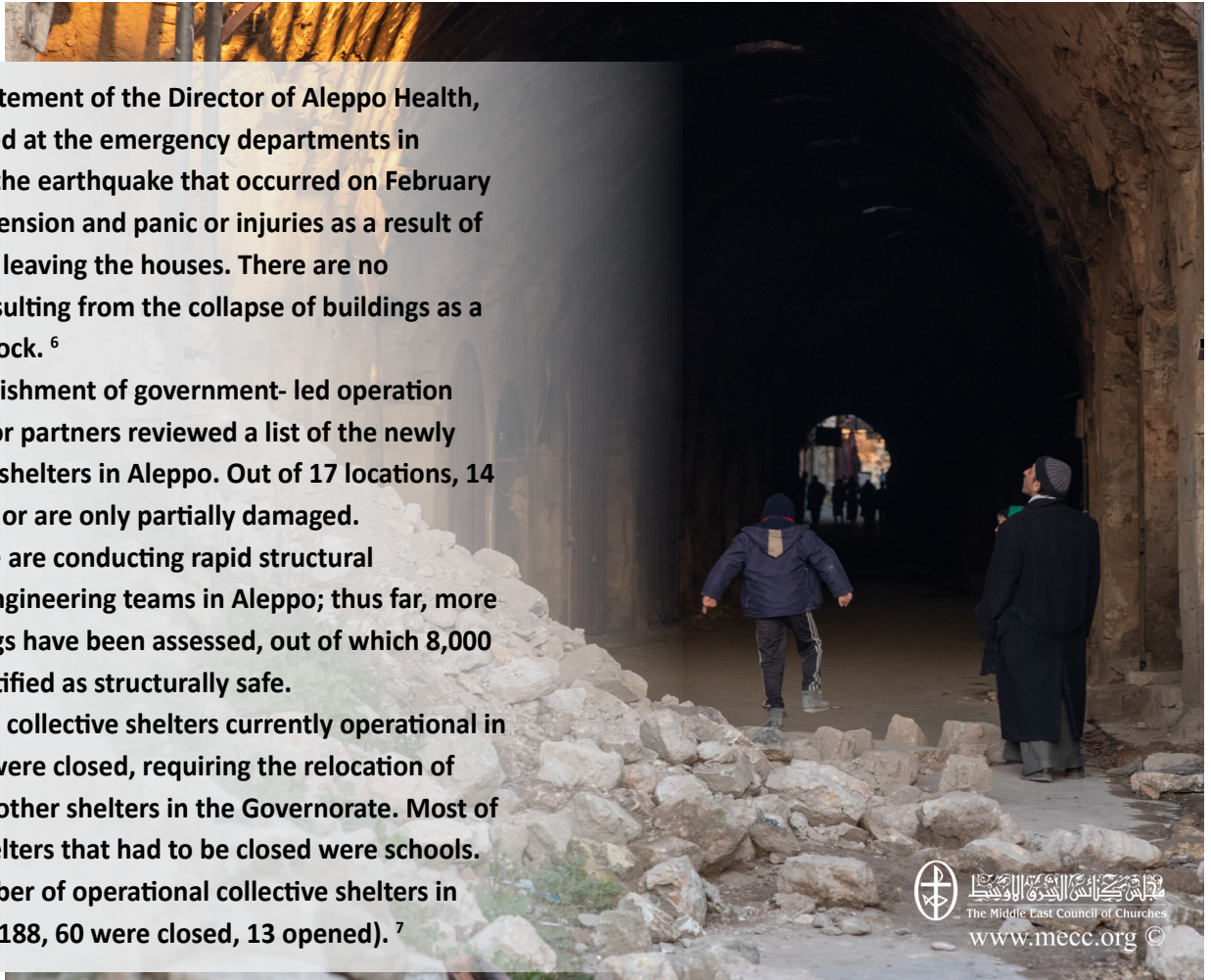
According to the statement of the Director of Aleppo Health, the cases that arrived at the emergency departments in hospitals following the earthquake that occurred on February 20 were caused by tension and panic or injuries as a result of the stampede while leaving the houses. There are no emergency cases resulting from the collapse of buildings as a result of the aftershock. ⁶

Following the establishment of government- led operation rooms, Shelter sector partners reviewed a list of the newly proposed collective shelters in Aleppo. Out of 17 locations, 14 are structurally safe or are only partially damaged.

Aleppo Governorate are conducting rapid structural assessments with engineering teams in Aleppo; thus far, more than 11,000 buildings have been assessed, out of which 8,000 buildings were identified as structurally safe.

Out of a total of 235 collective shelters currently operational in Aleppo, around 60 were closed, requiring the relocation of affected families to other shelters in the Governorate. Most of the 60 collective shelters that had to be closed were schools.

This brings the number of operational collective shelters in Aleppo to a total of 188, 60 were closed, 13 opened). ⁷



From the Grand Bazar in Aleppo

02 Hama and Homs Governorates

In Hama, as of 18 February, a total of 450 families (approximately 1,840 people) have been displaced by the earthquake. Approximately 1,020 individuals are currently staying at 11 designated collective shelters in Hama, while the remaining 820 are being hosted by relatives and local communities.

In Homs, the number of displaced families remained at 280 (approximately 1,090 people), with their majority – around 1,000 individuals – being hosted by relatives or local communities. ⁸

In the western countryside of Homs (Christian Valley), civil society hosts more than 110 displaced families from Aleppo and Latakia, where local NGOs, in cooperation with the people, secure homes for those vulnerable families, especially in the town of Al-Hawash. ⁹

[6] MOH, Facebook, 20 Feb

[7] UNHCR Syria Emergency Response to the Earthquake: Flash Update #12, 21 Feb

[8] UNHCR Syria Flash Update #11 Emergency Response to the Earthquake, 20 Feb

[9] MECC Team

03 Tartous and Latakia Governorates

In Latakia, The number of collective shelters in Latakia remains at 29. The local authorities reported that 103 buildings had collapsed, 300 buildings are at risk of collapsing (people have been evacuated from them) and 172,000 people are displaced. Most of these are staying with host communities although the authorities have made just 29 shelters available leading to overcrowding.¹⁰

A total of 1,160 families who fled their damaged houses in Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia are being hosted by local communities in Latakia and Tartous.¹¹

In Jableh, which is administratively affiliated to Latakia, there are eight collective shelters in rural areas hosting around 170 displaced families (approximately 850 individuals), while around 430 displaced families (approximately 2,150 individuals) are being hosted by relatives.¹²

In Mashta Al-Helou (Tartous countryside), there are about 236 displaced families, who were hosted by relatives or they rented houses, while some of them got empty houses provided by their owners to host these vulnerable families.¹³

04 Southern Governorates

Humanitarian partners reported the arrival of six families (approximately 30 individuals) in Quneitra Governorate, for the first time since the earthquake.

In Sweida Governorate, three new families (approximately 15 individuals) who had been displaced from Aleppo joined their families in the city of Sweida. Among the families there were persons with disability and in urgent need of medical support.¹⁴



Impact of the Earthquake in Jableh/ Latakia Governorates

[10] Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Coordinated Response Flash Update #13 - Earthquake

[11] UNHCR Syria Emergency Response to the Earthquake: Flash Update #12, 21 Feb

[12] UNHCR Syria Flash Update #11 Emergency Response to the Earthquake, 18 Feb

[13] MECC team

[14] UNHCR Syria Flash Update #11 Emergency Response to the Earthquake, 18 Feb

Updates on MECC Interventions & response preparation

Since the earthquake disaster occurred, the Middle East Council of Churches launched its “Rescue Syria Campaign”, and still pursuing its humanitarian mission aiming at helping the affected and afflicted people to overcome this ordeal and restore their usual life with dignity. Hence, the team of the MECC Service and Relief – Diakonia Department is continuing the distribution of aid kits to the people of the afflicted city of Aleppo.

On the latest intervention, the Diakonia team distributed, in partnership with PLAN International, food baskets and health kits to 350 affected families residing in the Greek Orthodox shelter of Saint Elias Church in the villas neighborhood in Aleppo.

It is worth mentioning that the Middle East Council of Churches had distributed 500 aid kits, including food baskets and health kits, to 250 families in the Al-Ma'ari School shelter, in the Sulaymaniyah neighborhood.



Testimonies

From the Field



MECC distributions for the affected people in the Greek Orthodox shelter of Saint Elias Church

S, a woman survivor says: "We are going through a dark tunnel with no end. I lost my house and everything it includes due the earthquake. What the war did not succeed to take from me, the earthquake did in the blink of an eye. We are psychologically very exhausted, and we have not yet recovered from the memories of the war until this harsh incident hit us. Since the earthquake occurred, we have not slept well, as we have fear from another new earthquake that could steel our life, especially after the earthquake that struck Aleppo days ago.

We seek any help at all levels, because we are in need of a lot of necessities. First, we need lighting due to long electricity shortage here. Secondly, there is also a lack of mattresses. I would like to thank you for your help, because we are in need of soap, sanitizers, and tissue paper, especially since the number of people is very big, and the bathrooms are limited and not equipped for a lot of people. This is in addition to out-of-service water taps."

B, a man survivor says: "I still remember the day of the earthquake... We were sleeping when the ground started to shake violently. I woke up due to the quake and to the voice of my father telling us to go outside the building... We were very afraid. We took refuge in the shelter. We lost hope to live a stable and calm life. We were displaced several times during the war and today we are displaced again. My only dream is to be able to live safely in my house, but it seems I will never be able to return to it because it includes a lot of cracks and may fall down at any moment... We are living in fear and afraid of another powerful earthquake.

The Middle East Council of Churches provided us soap, sanitizers, and food kits, and this is what we need today because we are no longer able to secure the simplest things for ourselves, so any help at this time is of great value. The people of Aleppo are in most need to be able to leave the shelters towards a safe house, as this is the most important thing a person needs."

D, a woman survivor says: "I lost my home and all my memories, as well as my friends... I lost everything. Today we are facing a severe and difficult economic hardship. We left our house in pyjamas and some of us went out without shoes. In a night, we became homeless, without anything, and in need of any assistance from any one to provide us food and clothes... This is a painful feeling.

The food basket and health kit that we got today fulfills part of our needs. In fact, we need a lot of things, even the simplest materials, because they are urgent and necessary... You can't live in a school that suddenly became a shelter center without having lack in many basic and necessary things such as tissue paper, soap, and toothbrush for example.

Video Reports :



1- Syria Is in Distress Due to the Earthquake that Hit It
Video - Safir Salim Describes the Situation in the Salesian Church in Aleppo



2- Moments of Terror Following the Earthquake that Struck Syria
Video - Georges Batikha Survives the Disaster and Highlights the Urgent Needs



3- Searching for Hope Following the Earthquake that Hit Syria
Video - Rogina Makhoul Describes the Fear of the Afflicted Families and Children



4- An Interview with His Eminence Ephraim Maalouli, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, Alexandretta and Dependencies, after the Earthquake that Struck Syria