

World Relief Reaching Young Afghan Refugees

The president of World Relief says squalid camps breed terrorists

In the wake of the terrorist attacks, Wheaton, Christian relief organization World Relief has focused its efforts on Central Asia with the hope of reaching Afghan youth before jihad groups go looking for new recruits for terrorist camps.

According to World Relief President Clive Calver, the current generation of terrorists includes many Afghan men who in the last 20 years have lived in squalid refugee camps. Providing humanitarian aid to the some 3.5 million disaffected Afghan refugees in camps sprawled along the Afghan borders of Iran and Pakistan is key to keeping youth out of terrorists' reach, Calver said.

"When we go into a country to work with refugees, one of our goals is to improve their living conditions," Calver told Charisma in mid-December, the day he returned from Iran and Afghanistan. "There's a whole generation of young men who will turn to terrorist camps if we don't reach them first. The hope is that as their physical needs are met, they'll see a loving God."

During his recent time in Iran and Afghanistan, Calver said he saw no evidence of terrorist recruitment in the two Afghan refugee camps he visited, though one was clearly full of ex-Taliban fighters.

"One camp felt like it was mainly civilians, and it felt

pretty free," Calver said. "The other [camp] had a real demonic influence, full of the Taliban." The agency's strategy, he said, is working, though it's slow going, since proselytizing in the camps is against the law.

"What we are seeing is that the youth are gathering around us and because the Iranian church are the ones giving them aid, they're seeing something different," Calver said. "The problem is that the Muslim world is taught that Christians are the people who bomb them. We've got to show that the church are the people who love them."

Through an invitation by the Iranian Church in Exile, World Relief staff traveled to disaffected areas to bring living assistance to Afghan refugees.

Calver noted that conditions in the two camps, overflowing with 11,000 people living in small, makeshift tents, were poor. Children are dying, he said.

Since late October, World Relief has provided medical assistance, eggs, fruits and vegetables, and bread to refugees. A day's supply of bread for the two camps, Calver said, costs \$1,100.

Through the Iranian churches, World Relief assisted families and youth like Saber, a 14-year-old boy Calver met in a camp. Saber's father was killed during one of the U.S. bombings in November.

"He's going to school in the camp and wants to be a teacher," Calver said. "He's one of these really clean-cut, winsome guys who's going to go somewhere. These are the people we're trying

to help. The key is it's not us they see, but the Iranian Christians."

"It gives the Iranian church the opportunity to establish an understanding for social action in the context of the gospel of how they can begin to reach their Afghani neighbors," Calver explained.

Iran, Calver said, is home to a total of 25 churches, including the secret ones. The largest church, an Assemblies of God congregation, boasts 700 members. In a country where evangelism is against the law, these churches are nurturing Christians Calver calls "fearless in their faith."

"I asked some of the church leaders if they were scared, especially when the secret police comes around. They say: 'We tell the police, "You can do three things; you can put us in prison, but then we'll tell the others in prison about Jesus. You can close church but then we open church in home. You close home, we open another home. You can kill us. But then our brothers see the blood of martyrs, and the church grows more.'"

Calver said that while refugees are not yet thinking about returning to their homes, they will return to ruins since most homes were destroyed.

World Relief, he said in mid-December, is out of money. At press time, Calver had returned to the States to raise more funds to help Afghan refugees rebuild their communities.

-Lindy Warren

Tax-deductible contributions for the Afghan relief effort can be sent to World Relief, P.O. Box 597, Baltimore, MD 21203.