

Why the World Is Waking Up to This Crisis

A photo of a 3-year-old Syrian boy's body awash on a Turkish beach after a refugee boat capsized en route to Greece drew unprecedented attention to a largely ignored crisis. Aid workers are waiting to see if it will make a difference.

The director of a ministry group in Turkey that helped the drowned toddler's family said he fears local people's memory of the image and the refugee crisis will soon fade, and whether the same is true for the global community remains to be seen.

"Believe me, after two weeks people will forget about this tragedy," the director said regarding the Sept. 2 drowning of Aylan Kurd; his 5-year-old brother, Galip; his mother, Rehan; and nine others in the Aegean Sea. "In Turkey, the agenda is changing so fast, and people will forget about refugees."

Indigenous Christian workers in Turkey, who have been providing aid to Syrian war refugees, will be there long after international attention is diverted to other issues. The native missionaries continue providing aid regardless of fluctuations in world attention, but they need assistance to purchase supplies.

The drowned boy's father, Abdullah Kurdi, fled to Turkey with his family in 2012 after the civil war broke out in 2011. They reportedly returned to Syria earlier this year, settling in the border town of Kobani after forces drove out the Islamic State (ISIS).

When ISIS launched another offensive against the town in late June, the family again fled to Turkey and ended up in a refugee camp near Adana, where the ministry assisted by Christian Aid Mission serves. The ministry director, whose

name is withheld for security reasons, said Kurdi's family was reluctant to accept aid. Previously they had lived in an apartment paid for mostly by family members abroad because Kurdi's construction job covered only a small amount of their monthly expenses, and they were not used to taking charity from strangers.

"That family was so quiet, never in a hurry to get the help from us," the director said. "They were silent and felt ashamed when picking up boxes from my hand. The mother was always inside the tent with the kids, rather than coming out to try to get more aid from us."

Ministry workers had the opportunity to share the message of Christ's salvation with the family, the ministry director said. Kurdi and his family listened "with happiness," he said, but they relocated to another camp with better water sources and other services before they could make a decision. A worker there reported that he tried to keep Kurdi from making the perilous journey.

"He tried to stop them, but the answer he got back was fateful: Abdullah said, 'I can't wait. My family is dying in front of my eyes. I can't bring them food and can't send them to school. They will have a better life in Europe,'" the ministry director said.

Kurdi's sister-in-law in Canada told media he had no teeth and that part of the "better life" they sought in Europe included getting dental implants. She also said Kurdi had a difficult time finding acceptance in Turkey as a Syrian and a Kurd, where a Kurdish rebellion has flared for decades. The family set out from a remote beach near the resort town of Bodrum, in southwestern Turkey, with other refugees. They were in a boat heading to the Greek island of Kos, which at its closest point is only 2.5 miles from the Turkish coast.

Large waves tossed the small dinghy crowded beyond its

capacity, and all but Kurdi joined an estimated 2,300 people who have perished at sea trying to reach Europe this year.

Some of the refugees fled military offensives of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and others tried to escape the rebel shelling and ISIS atrocities. A pastor in the Syrian town of Sweida said he had to leave his church in Daraa due to the fighting. He usually visits the congregation each month, but intense fighting prevented him from doing so last month.

“There were many bombings and attacks,” said the pastor, whose ministry provides aid to people displaced internally by the war. “Our church has no lights left that work anymore. Twice, artillery shells fell next to or around the church. The last time was about 12 days ago, when a shell fell two meters away from the church. There are still Christians in Daraa, but only half the number that used to live there.”

The scale of the refugee crisis is staggering, though world response has been a fraction of the outpouring to lesser—and less complicated—disasters. More than 4 million people have fled Syria during four years of civil war and the Islamic State’s drive to create a caliphate amid the chaos. About 2.1 million of those who have fled Syria have arrived in Turkey, according to U.N. figures.

Images of a Hungarian train station that turned into an open-air refugee camp when trains to Austria and Germany were temporarily stopped last week, and the Aug. 27 discovery of 71 dead migrants inside a smuggler’s truck in Hungary, have also raised awareness of the crisis. Even as some European countries pledge to accept more refugees, however, the U.N. is being forced to scale back aid programs due to funding shortfalls.

“Aid is being cut and programs are being suspended at the very moment when those who left Syria in haste, expecting they soon would go home, are running out of savings and wearing out the

welcome they initially received," *The Washington Post* reported Aug. 29.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees office has provided more than \$5.6 billion in aid for Syrians since 2011, less than half the amount needed, it reported. Of the \$ billion needed this year for Syrian refugees, only \$ billion has been received, according to the United Nations.

The ministry director in Turkey said Syrian refugees are spread throughout the country in dilapidated apartments, tent camps and on the streets because the government cannot take care of all of them. He said the indigenous ministry is providing food, medicines, Bibles, baby formula, diapers, clothes, shoes, heaters and blankets.

"It's not the first instance of kids drowned at sea, nor will it be the last," he said. "I was able to talk with that family when we gave out boxes of relief items in July. It's so sad, but they had nothing else to do in Turkey. So we have to act fast to help these people, otherwise many will die when they are trying to flee to Europe."