CHILDREN ON THE SCRAPHEAP

‘I lived through the war in Syria,’ says Ahed, aged 10. ‘We were bombed every day, and every day something was destroyed. I saw the damage all around me. I saw buildings collapse near my house. Then our home was destroyed too.’

As we approach March this year, the conflict in Syria will reach another grim milestone – six years of brutal war. That's longer than the Second World War.

Widespread destruction of civilian homes and workplaces has forced nearly five million Syrians to flee, mostly to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

According to ACAPS, there are now 1.5 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon with 75% of refugees women and children (although because the registration has halted, the true numbers are difficult to know) – this means that Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide.

Living in the dirt
Six years of upheaval is a long time in anyone's life, but for Ahed, it is almost all he can remember. Ahed lives with his mum, dad and five brothers and sisters. Originally from Homs in Syria, they now live in a makeshift shelter in the Bekaa valley, home to more than 350,000 refugees.

‘We've been in Lebanon for five years but I am not happy here,’ says Ahed. ‘We live in the dirt and rubbish. But at least it's peaceful. My parents are safe and I live with them. I look after my brothers and sisters.’

Delivering hope
Syrian refugee families are in a desperate situation. But, in the midst of huge unrest and devastation, there is hope.

Tearfund partner Heart for Lebanon is organising Christians to distribute essential food and hygiene parcels to families displaced by the conflict.
‘I love everything in the food parcel, it’s all good to eat and gives us energy,’ says Ahed. ‘We thank God for it! I love the cheese and the tins of meat. My mother is a great cook and makes us delicious things with it.’

‘Thank you for supporting us with food parcels!’ adds Ahed’s mother, Yana. ‘Thanks to the food parcel, we have money left over to pay for medical treatment and fresh fruit for our children. So, thank you for all that you do to support us. Without the food parcels, we would struggle to pay for the things we need. And thank you that it’s something we can rely on every month.’

When everything else is in turmoil and with no end to the conflict or prospect of returning home in sight, Heart for Lebanon’s food parcels provide a regular source of hope to hundreds of families in the Bekaa valley.

Heart for Lebanon’s hope is that through this provision, Syrian refugees will become self-sufficient in Lebanon. When peace is restored, they want to encourage families to return home and help rebuild Syria, equipped with the strength they need to succeed and forge a better future.

PLEASE PRAY

• The need is great and, with no immediate end to these conflicts in sight, it is growing. Pray for lasting peace to be restored in Syria and an end to the conflict.
• Lift up all those affected by war – in the face of such unprecedented disaster, the need to strengthen and support families such as Ahed’s has never been more urgent.
• Lift up Heart of Lebanon and all those helping to bring aid to people in need. Pray that they will be encouraged and strengthened in their endeavours.

A NOTE FROM…

‘My son Benedict is five years old and it’s an amazing experience life through his eyes – full of wonder and possibilities. That’s why it’s so heartbreaking for me to see the difference in Ahed’s life. So please join me in prayer for Syrian children in Lebanon, for their protection and for God to restore their childhoods.’

Peter Shaw, Senior Publications Editor

FAMINE DECLARED IN SOUTH SUDAN

The devastating reality of famine has hit parts of South Sudan affecting 100,000 people, according to its government and the UN.

This is the first time in six years that anywhere in the world has reached this level of food insecurity. In 2011 Somalia’s famine left around 260,000 dead.

Earlier this year the monitoring group FEWS NET warned of four looming famines in Yemen,
Somalia and north-eastern Nigeria in 2017, and South Sudan the first to declare.

As the world’s newest country, the situation is set to worsen as food stocks become depleted. More than three years of conflict combined with the continued devaluation of the South Sudanese Pound, acute malnutrition, difficulties in transporting aid, and below average harvests, have brought about this scenario.

Donald Mavunduse, Tearfund’s Head of East and Southern Africa Team, says: 'This is a desperate situation for South Sudan to be facing and we are worried that it is only going to get worse in the coming months with famine spreading more widely. Already, 4.9m people, more than 40 per cent of the population, are in need of urgent food, clean water and nutrition assistance. Inflation has rocketed to between 800 and 900%, so buying food has become impossible for ordinary people, and there is little sign of the conflict coming to an end.'

In former Jonglei State, Tearfund is providing children and pregnant and lactating mothers with treatment for malnutrition, along with nutrition and hygiene education, whilst providing boreholes along with training in safe water use. In addition, Tearfund is providing food assistance to displaced people in the capital Juba.

Within South Sudan’s borders there are 1.89m displaced people, and a further 1.5m have crossed borders into Ethiopia and Uganda and other surrounding states.

PLEASE PRAY

• Pray for the people of South Sudan, particularly in areas facing the worst of the famine.
• Pray for efforts to get food and supplies to those most in need.
• Ask God for wisdom and confidence in how you could share this news among your friends, family and on social media.

LIFE’S A PEACH

How Bolivia’s answer to Coca Cola became one community’s answer to their terrible poverty.

Mocochinchi is something of an institution in Bolivia. It’s a sweet drink made with dried peaches and cinnamon and a source of national pride. In 2012 the Bolivian foreign minister urged the nation to drink Mocochinchi instead of Coke as the government tried to expel Coca Cola from the country.

And it was Mocochinchi that helped bring Vitichi back from the brink of desolation – with the help of the local churches and Tearfund!

The Vitichi region was facing ruin. Located in the Bolivian highlands it has suffered severe droughts, due to the effects of climate change. The once green pastures were becoming barren. It wasn’t possible to feed the oxen that once ploughed the land. With poor agriculture, men began migrating to bigger cities in search of alternative work to support their families.
On their knees and on their feet

Leaders of local churches began praying to God for a solution. However they knew that their role didn’t just begin and end with prayer; the churches had been trained in Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM), thanks to Tearfund. CCM courses encourage local churches to see themselves as ‘salt and light’; it helps them see that they are called and empowered to transform their own communities – along with the community itself. In short it was time to pray and act…

‘We were desperate and ready to try anything to find a solution,’ explained Daniela Piuca, a 35-year-old mother of three from Vitichi. ‘I didn’t want my husband going to a far-away city for a long period of time; when men leave the family they meet other woman and they abandon their families.’

They started lobbying the local authorities to provide some resources and solutions to the challenges they were facing. The authorities provided small tractors to plough the land instead of the oxen. It gave the families the opportunity to prepare the land in a cheaper way.

Then, for the first time in a while, the rains arrived when expected and the people of Vitichi reaped a much-needed good harvest. However, the community realised that they would lose a lot of their fruit because they were too wet, and would soon rot.

Once more unto the peach

Once again the church mobilised the community to try and find an answer. ‘We decided to present another project to the authorities,’ recounts Daniela. ‘We wanted to build a small greenhouse to dry the peaches. Mocachinchi, is made from dry peaches.’

The local authorities were quick to support this new project. ‘As a result now we are not just food producers, we are learning how to add value to what we grow. It has given us the opportunity to get income during the whole year, not just the harvest season.’

The community is enjoying a bit of a renaissance. Crucially, the men of Vitichi are no longer migrating to cities. Daniela sums it up: ‘Families are together the whole year again and we are getting enough money to cover our needs. People are even coming back to the town. We praise the Lord for what we’ve discovered through the CCM project; it’s helped us bring hope back to our own village.’

PLEASE PRAY

- That Bolivia will be able to cope with the effects of the worst drought in 25 years.
- For the villages in the Vitichi region will continue to flourish, building further income generation schemes.
- For Tearfund’s partners in Bolivia as they encourage more churches to mobilise their communities for change.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

☑ Over the past week, Pakistan has faced a new wave of terror attacks. Please lift up this tense situation, and pray for all those who are injured or have lost loved ones. Please pray that those perpetrating these attacks would turn away from violence.

24 February 2017 One Voice weekly prayer email
 tearfund.org/praying
Pray for the Inhambane and Gaza provinces of Mozambique, which were hit by Cyclone Dineo last Thursday, affecting over 650,000 people. While loss of life was small, around 20,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed, along with many health centres and schools. Crop damage was also significant which will lead to food shortages for many families in the coming months.

As the season of Lent approaches, we invite you to pray with us and join us as we journey through 40 days of prayers, reflections, and devotions. We’ll think about some of the great challenges in our world, such as hunger and climate change, and we’ll meet some amazing people we can pray for. Sign up for our ‘Living Water’ Lent emails at http://www.tearfund.org/lent_2017