

It is time to sow the seeds for a culture of charity

Dear friends and supporters,

I have been hoping so much to be able one of these days to share some good news with you. Unfortunately, however, the information I keep receiving is far from positive. Life in Syria has become increasingly difficult. The suffering and the burdens are not evenly distributed. There are those who in fact benefit from the hardships of others. The vast majority of people, however, are desperately struggling to survive. The deprivations are becoming ever worse and more painful, leaving me almost. I keep receiving many phone calls and messages from families with desperate pleas for help. The misery of the people is beyond description. I must admit that I am often quite frustrated. But we have not yet lost hope. What is currently happening in Syria is, without any doubt, lacking human dignity. I am therefore asking you for your brotherly and sisterly advice.

While some things have improved slightly, there are still major difficulties in many areas. Electricity is now available almost constantly in some places, unfortunately this is not the case everywhere.



Furthermore, electricity has become very expensive. Most people's monthly salaries can barely cover the costs. Energy prices have recently risen sharply by 30%. As a result, almost all goods have become significantly more expensive due to increased transportation costs. Even bread, the basic food, has become more expensive. The average monthly salary is the equivalent of €100. However, a family in Syria today needs at least €1,000 to live a reasonably decent life. Yet there are unfortunately far too few jobs. People are constantly being laid off, and even for those who do have work, salaries are

often shockingly low. Income is distributed very unfairly. Some people earn four-digit amounts in foreign currency, while others are paid very poorly in local currency. There is still no parliament to pass laws. One clearly notices chaos in politics and in the economy and one sees that the government has to tackle many problems.

As a result of the rising cost of living, many social activities are also being affected. The quality of education in public schools has declined noticeably. The quality of education in private schools remains high, but tuition costs have risen sharply and place an enormous financial burden on families. Many families turn to Korbgemeinschaft for help.

Medical care is also far from satisfactory. Some public hospitals lack the supplies needed for treatments and surgeries. In some cases, patients are asked to procure and provide these supplies themselves, as otherwise treatment cannot be performed. Even the cost of diagnostic tests has become unaffordable for many. There are some private hospitals, but these are very expensive. Cancer patients face astronomical bills. Unfortunately, such cases are not uncommon. Social institutions such as nursing homes, orphanages, schools and homes for the disabled are



constantly threatened with closure because they do not know how to finance their staff, care products, and the maintenance of their operations.

What I much regret is that many large aid organizations and NGOs have drastically scaled back or even ended their projects and activities in Syria, stating that there are no more funds available. A bakery in Aleppo run by the Franciscans, which provides free bread to some 500 poor families every day, now has to close because its previous sponsors can no longer provide support. Initiatives such as meal distributions, aid packages, and similar efforts have been suspended on the grounds that there is great need in so many places.

Our Bakery of Grace still functions, thanks to the generous support from donors.

I had never before received as many phone calls as has been the case lately. Many people in need are reaching out to *Korbgemeinschaft* in the hope that we can support their charitable projects. Students, the sick, schools, and others are turning to us with urgent pleas for help. I myself no longer know how we can help all these desperate people, which makes me sad and depressed. When a reasonably well-off friend calls me and asks to borrow money, I wonder about the needs of all those who have no income at all.

As I mentioned in my latest letter, many investors no longer dare to take the risk of investing in Syria because there is neither a sound infrastructure nor security. The political situation is unstable. Only a few businesses are still able to make a profit. The unemployment rate is therefore extremely high. This leads to ever-increasing poverty. This, in turn, leads to hardship, and hardship entails crime. Crime is destabilizing social life. Due to widespread poverty, theft is currently rampant in Syria. For example, there are large, specialized gangs of thieves in the Damascus area who specialize in stealing cables. Since internet cables are expensive, they are forcefully torn out of walls without regard to the service they provide. This leaves people without communication. Security in rural areas is even less guaranteed than in cities. People are frightened by motorcyclists who snatch items from the hands of passersby as they drive by. No one can do anything about it, since such robbers are usually armed. There is hardly any protection from a functioning police force.

Unfortunately, public services are also very limited. The individual communities have to manage virtually everything on their own. In the villages, people thus have to take care of their own safety.

I am terribly sorry for having to tell you such sad things. But this is the daily reality we cannot ignore. The poverty has become indescribable and unbearable. This problem can no longer be overcome without social cohesion beyond country borders.

Perhaps the time has come right now to do everything in our power to spread a culture of compassion. It all starts on a small scale. With plenty of perseverance, faith, hope, and determination, we can steer society toward a sort of healing. I guess that some NGOs may be giving up here and there because conventional aid in Syria seems



Setting up an office for a helper team of Korbgemeinschaft

like pouring water into a bottomless barrel. Somehow, people there need to get back on their feet. Above all, they need a helping hand to get started. This start-up support is like sowing seeds in open soil. It requires a lot of care at the beginning, but the seed begins to sprout, it grows higher, and one

day it will bear fruit. This is the objective of *Korbgemeinschaft*: TO HELP PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES. This can only be successful if the spirit of charity is alive. We can find this spirit in Christianity. There is much to be done in Syria today. There are so many competent and talented people. The poor long for work. All they hope for is to gain enough for their daily bread and for a life of dignity. Poverty is not inherently bad, as long as it is bearable. Provided that basic needs are met, frugality can be fertile ground for a dignified, Christian life. Let us help our fellow Christians to once again be able to live by the work of their own hands!



The Social Market (SOMAs) project has been very well received. So far, three stores have been opened and five more are on the waiting list. They seem like a lifeline for the poor and those in need. Through this project, we can bear witness to the culture of charity that lies at the heart of our Christian faith. We named these shops "Charity Markets". This project will surely bear good fruit if it is carried out by dedicated individuals in a Christian spirit. I am firmly convinced that when faithful Christians take action, miracles can happen. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to all our

friends for their generous donations, which enable us to practice our faith in the spirit of Christ.

May the Holy Spirit, whose descent we recently celebrated, bestow upon you abundant gifts, but above all good health and joy!

Your

Fr. Hanna Ghoneim



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