

INTERVARSITY
URBANA15

THE GLOBAL CHURCH
AND PERSECUTION:

CHRISTIAN REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS
GIDEON PARA-MALLAM, IFES

The Church, Persecution and Christians

Fr. Daniel Behnam, an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), Iraqi Syriac Orthodox Priest with his parishioners from Baashiqa, a town in the Plains of Nineveh, Northern Iraq

- Sharing from a rich Mesopotamian Christian mosaic, he says that “A church that is not suffering is not a church,” citing a famous add-on by his late Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I to the Creed, ‘one holy catholic, apostolic *and persecuted* church . . .’ This provides the connecting link: persecution, refugees and IDPs

Outline

1. Definitions
2. Jesus and family: Refugees in Africa from Palestine
3. Situation Analysis and Realities
4. A Christian Response
5. Conclusion

The Challenge of Refugee/IDP Isn't Far from Home

- A woman who escaped from Nigeria because of Boko-Haram to Cameroun lost her husband and properties, literally everything. As a refugee in camp, she cried-out in frustration, desperation and despair, and remarked: *"if this is what it means to be a Christian, I want to have none of it."*
- The late John Buseh, a former General Secretary of IFES in Liberia, fled his nation's senseless civil war in the '90s to Ghana and became a refugee and later an Internally Displaced Person (IDP). His experiences as a refugee in Ghana led him to make a vow that he would rather go back with his family to his war-torn homeland of Liberia as an IDP and even die, if need be, than remain a refugee in Ghana. One wonders, what could have led John to this difficult conclusion/decision?

1. Definition: *Who are Refugees/Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)?*

According to Article 1A.2 of the 1951 Geneva Convention, and additional protocol of 1967, a refugee is someone who:

- “Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership, in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside a country of his nationality and is unable, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

A Refugee and an Internally Displaced Person are practically the same.

About 60 million people in 2015 were forcibly displaced due to violence. A massive 11 million of these are IDPs – 30,000 daily.

*(Norwegian Refugee Council-based,
Internally Displacement
Monitoring Centre – IDMC)*

The underlying difference between the terms are that:

A refugee must be outside the country of his or her nationality or country of former habitual residence

An internally displaced person stays within his or her country but migrates to safer regions free of those fears

Key Elements which Define Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

The fear factor and persecution must be real and without State protection

The persecution must be for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinions or membership of a particular social group

Move outside the country of his or her nationality or, if stateless, outside the country of formal habitual residence. But in the case of IDPs within and unable to return

What are some misconceptions about refugees from various perspectives today? For some only an African, European, Middle East worries?

- Some people link the present surge of refugees from the Middle East to Europe as a grand plan to Islamize Europe through the back door
- How real or not is this?

2. Jesus and Family: Refugees in Africa from Palestine

Jesus as a child was a
refugee in Africa from
Palestine - Matthew
2:12-15

- How was he perceived, received and treated?
- What are Christian attitudes towards refugees? (*Hospitality, Hostility or Indifference*)?
- Theological reasons for extending hospitality; Leviticus 19:34, Hebrews 13:1-3

What are some misconceptions about refugees from various perspectives today? For Example 50,000 displaced from Qaraqosh in Iraq, 149, air lifted to Slovakia

- "... The plight of refugees/ IDPs and immigrants is not just an African or European challenge but a global reality today. The global church needs to be a part of a collective effort in finding solutions. Jesus was also a refugee in Africa." GP-M
- What happens if one part of the body is hurting? 1st Corinthians 12 : 25-26

***What can we learn from this? And
what must we not ignore?***

Let's discuss . . .

***Christian virtues
of hospitality and
sharing one
another's burdens***

What Can we Learn . . . Stories from IFES Prayerline - October 2015 - A Cup of Cold Water: Students respond to the refugee crisis: SEAM Exodus Macedonia: Students provided supplies to the long line at the Croatia-Serbia border. *'Many more students are getting involved with helping the refugees now. They are fundraising and sending money to critical places of need. Prayer is needed, they say, but also practical help.'*

SXEF, Greece -
Students from
Thessaloniki
volunteering near the
Northern border
Students with SXEF
Greece are mobilizing
to help throughout
the country.

Sophia, a student,
helping there, agrees
with Grigoris. *'Our daily
missions gave us the
opportunity not to just
speak for God but
to **do** something for
him. Just with a smile, a
bottle of water or some
food . . .'*

*' . . . We brought food, some
medicine and clothes to them.
It was heartbreaking to talk
with them and listen to their
stories.'* While SMD Germany
students were helping. One
group took hygiene products as
well as pens and paper to the
600 refugees housed in the
University of Dresden gym.

3. Situation Analysis & Realities

What are the Causes and Effects of Displacement and Forced Migration?

Displacement and immigration often occur as a result of ethnic, religious, political and economic crisis or persecution.

The most prevalent situations arise from religious discrimination, especially targeted at the Church.

- 80% of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians.

Circumstances surrounding refugees

Causes & effects

ethnic, religious, political and economic repression leading to instability, poverty, starvation, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, etc.

Examples

Current wars in Libya, Iraq, Syria

Terrorism activities in Mali, Nigeria, Somalia & Kenya


Far-reaching consequences with global implications. Upsurge in terrorism results in mass exodus of refugees and/or IDP crises

Refugees/ IDPs and the Persecuted Church globally

Majority of new displacements in 2014 was a result of protracted crises in Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan & Syria. These 5 countries accounted for 60% of new displacement worldwide (International Society for Human Rights, IDMC's 2015 Global overview).

As at 2014 – 38M people were reported to have been displaced. Iraq civilians suffered the most current displacements with at least 2.2M people displaced in 2014.

About 7.4M people, constituting 40% of Syria's population, have been displaced – the highest number in the world.



Europe, for the first time in more than a decade, suffered massive enforced displacement, caused by war in Eastern Ukraine – more than 640,000 fled in 2014. 2015 over 1M.

The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity in the US estimates that 100, 000 Christians now die every year, because of their faith – i.e. eleven every hour.

Hostility to religion reached a new high in 2012, when Christians faced discrimination in 139 countries, almost 3/4 of the world's nations (Pew Research Center).

In early 21st Century, 500 Christians were hacked to death with a machete by Hindu radicals in Orissa, India; they injured 50,000 making them homeless.

Iraq

- 1 in 10 Iraqis are IDPs today. *Wikipedia*

Syria

- 6.5 million IDPs and 2.5 million living as refugees in neighboring countries. *UNHCR*

Nigeria

- 3.3 million IDPs and thousands of refugees in neighboring countries such as Cameroun, Niger and Chad. *Premium Times ng.com*

Mali

- 61,621 IDPs and 182,780 refugees. *Internal Displaced Monitoring Centre*

Causes and Effects of Displacement and Forced Migration

Many times these refugees are being taken advantage of in society from employment or become exploited as cheap laborers and no reckoning in educational placements by policy institutions and implementation.



IDPs are considered as second-class citizens even though they are displaced in their own country.

Situational Realities

South Sudan: Outreach to Refugees/IDPs by IFES

Idea born during prayer & reflection on how to reach out to large number of refugee students from Nuba Mountain, Blue Nile, and Darfur studying in South Sudan, starting with Juba.

Initiative came during talks with the Christian students from Nuba Mountain who said the best way to reach out to them is to demonstrate acts of love by meeting physical needs.

Needs met include: helping prospective university students learn English, assisting them get admitted into South Sudanese universities & helping high school graduates find jobs within South Sudan

The course ran successfully:

- 48 students joined for the level one and level two
- Course is coordinated by 2 Sudanese: a student from Juba University and an Associate of FOCUS
- Course has created a medium for direct communication with the refugee students from Sudan who live in Juba.
- Many of them are Muslims, who had the chance to interact with Christians in the class; Christians had the opportunity to share love God with them.

4. A Christian Response

- Martin Luther King Jr says: 'You can't fight hate with hate. You fight hate with love.'
- We need to create awareness about the plight of refugees and IDPs around the world.
- Christian Faculties who engage in work around this important subject matter could be encouraged to write articles/books on the topic. This will provide vital information as most students, especially Christians, know little or nothing about the plight of refugees and IDPs in their own countries, not to talk of other countries.

First &
Second

Third

Missional opportunities in the Current Global Refugee Crisis

Many refugees/IDPs have not heard the goodnews about Jesus Christ.

Outreaches and aids by student movements/Christian groups would go a long way in reaching them with the Good News of salvation and the love of God in a practical sense.

Refugees and IDPs
experience a lot of
difficulties

- e.g. adapting to the new conditions they are forced to live with.

Psychological effects and
other consequences of
leaving the good lives they
once had

- jobs, decent homes, stable social relations are of challenges that refugees/IDPs experience.

Missional Opportunities in the Global Refugee Crisis

The Church should see the global refugee crisis as an opportunity for harvest from a field, ripe with souls that are hungry to experience the peace and love that only a relationship with Jesus can bring.

In some student movements across the EPISA region and in fact globally, students are becoming very interested and involved in reaching out to refugees and IDPs.

Resource mobilization, contribution of food items, clothings, basic healthcare products, helping start prayer meetings and bible studies in IDP camps constitute varying ways in which these impactful outreaches are strategically carried out.

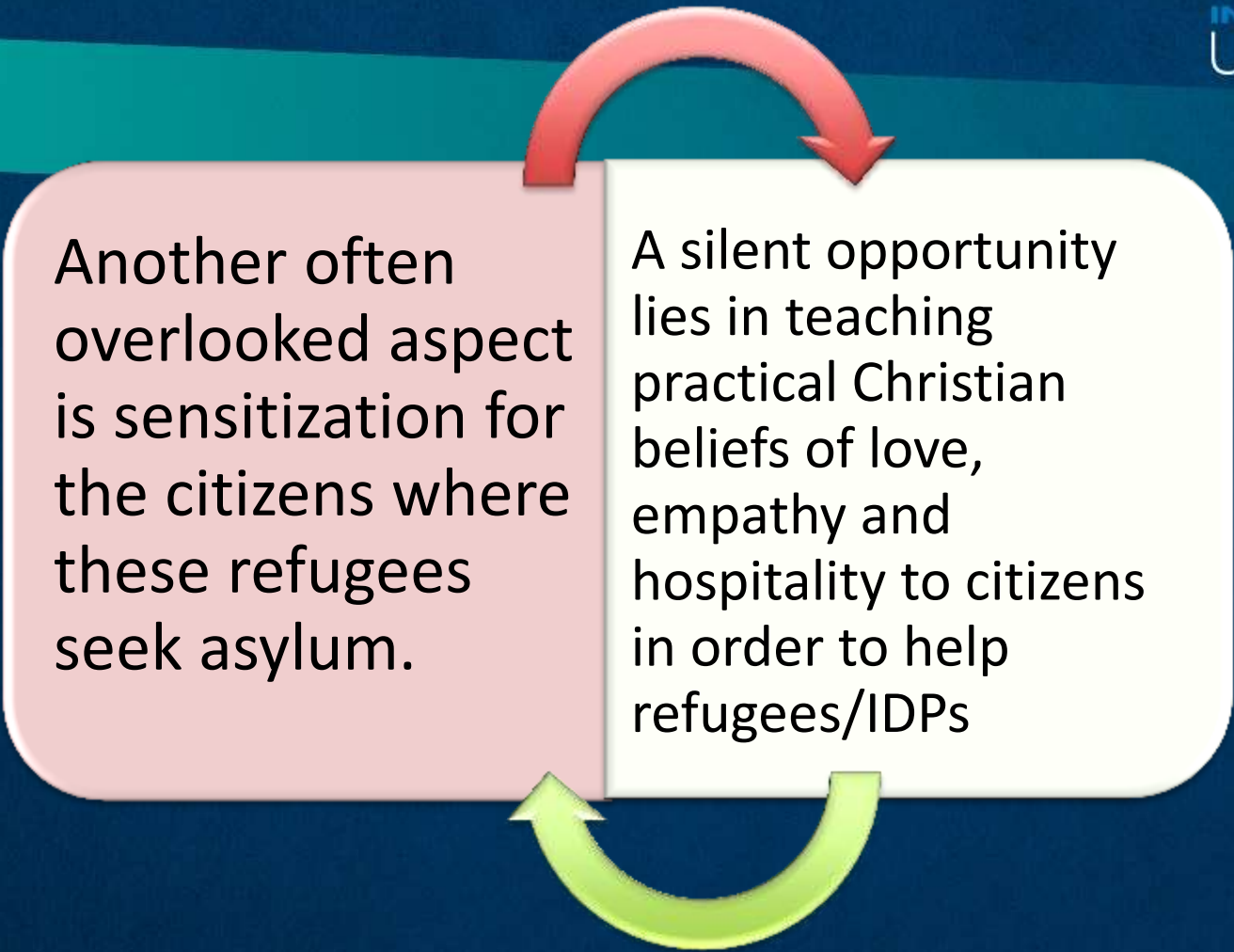
Missional Opportunities in the Global Refugee Crisis

Missional opportunities abound among refugees, to reach out to their basic needs. Ranging from opportunities to provide:

Education via scholarships, grants, soft loans and educational/ academic materials

Healthcare outreaches,

Vocational and psychological counselling



Another often overlooked aspect is sensitization for the citizens where these refugees seek asylum.

A silent opportunity lies in teaching practical Christian beliefs of love, empathy and hospitality to citizens in order to help refugees/IDPs

A Christian response: *Missional Opportunities in Global Refugee crisis - IDPs in Nigeria due to Boko Haram Attacks: A Case Study*

**Boko Haram
atrocities**

Over 20,000
people including
students, killed in
less than 5 years

Millions rendered
homeless mostly as
IDPs and others as
refugees in neighboring
Cameroon, Niger &
Chad Republics.

In Nigeria, the
Church and NIFES
sees missional
opportunities
beyond the present
challenges.

The Church in Maiduguri has been under tremendous attack since the Boko Haram onslaught.

- Many Christians killed including students and hundreds of churches destroyed; massive emigration of Christians
- E.g. In EYN 1,674 Churches destroyed, 8,038 members killed, 700,000 members displaced including 2,092 Pastors (data from President of *Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria* (EYN- Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), Rev. Dr. Samuel Dante Dali)
- Fall-out: IFES-EPISA Regional Sec. (*Gideon Para-Mallam*) with 7 others visited two Jos-based IDPs Stefanos Foundation and House of ReCab on Dec. 17th, 2015. (pictures, next slides)

Picture with some IDPs



5. Conclusion

Closing Reflection: Even without the bible urging us, a compelling moral indignation should provoke a believer to act on this issue. What are those issues which are more central to the structure of our lives? What would Jesus DO? Hear this prayer wish from an Iraqi Nun who works among IDPs inside Iraq . . .

An article by the World Watch Monitor speaks about an Iraqi nun, Sister Hayat, who was forced to flee her monastery by Islamic State – ISIS and is now helping refugees in the city of Erbil. She speaks from the refugee camp at Erbil, describing the condition of Christians in Iraq by saying they are:

“CONFUSED, IN SHOCK, AND FEEL UNSAFE. THEY ARE WITHOUT IDENTITY AND FEEL COMPLETELY LOST IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY. THEY’RE ASKING GOD WHAT HE WANTS THEM TO DO. SHOULD THEY MIGRATE? OR SHOULD THEY STAND FIRMLY IN THIS COUNTRY, ACCEPTING WHAT GOD IS DOING HERE? PRAY THAT GOD OPENS DOORS FOR THEM AND SHOWS THEM WHICH ONE TO TAKE.”

Thank You

