



Sponsorship Network International

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SNI Visit to Reyhanli and Iskenderun Refugee Centers (March 2022)

In February 2022, Paul Viola (the founder and director of Human Action Int.) invited us to visit his project of reintegrating displaced refugees from the Syria war over the last 10 years and helping them to establish themselves in the Hatay region of southern Turkey. I readily agreed, Sponsorship Network had been supporting Paul's efforts over the past 5 years and a personal visit to the frontlines was long overdue!

With several weeks of preparation, the R&D for SNI (Ildiko Katai) had everything in order for us to travel, so on the 16th of March we boarded the plane bound for the regional airport of Hatay. Upon arrival I was pleasantly surprised by how warmly we were greeted by Sultan (the jovial manager of the refugee center), Jamama (his wife and the "woman's touch" to the housing facilities) as well as their 2 young children. It immediately struck me how open and welcoming they were to us, as complete strangers, and how they readily welcomed us into their community and showered us with gifts and demonstrations of thankfulness, even though we were the ones coming from a wealthy, politically stable region and were in a far better condition to be benefactors rather than beneficiaries.

On the first day we visited the refugee center in Reyhanli, and I immediately sensed the dedication of those involved with HAI's initiative. The teachers (who were also refugees and had managed to establish themselves with careers of their own) as well as the students, made every effort to assist the Syrian community to prosper in their new found home away from the nation of their origin. The dedication to strive for a stable future despite the tragedies faced during the war, and the loss of their homes and most of their belongings, is a true testament to the vitality and camaraderie of the Syrian people. I was extremely impressed with their hopeful outlook on the future and their joy at being able to rebuild their lives.

In the afternoon we continued our journey to the border region where a wall had been erected to stop the flow of civilians from streaming into Turkey fleeing the violence unleashed by the powerful factions at play in their bid to control Syria, atrocities and human rights violations being unleashed on the innocent population from both sides. As we gazed upon the camp on the far side of the wall, the over 150,000 Syrians who had not been so lucky to cross the border before the wall had been built to block their path, I was overcome with remorse for those who lived for the past 5 years in shelters ranging from tents to crudely constructed brick huts with no water, heating, electricity let alone proper sanitation and health





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services. It is unimaginable to most of us in our opulent “western civilization” what challenges they must face in their daily struggle to survive.

The next day we travelled to the neighboring city of Iskenderun which housed the second refugee center that HAI had founded. Upon arrival I was greatly impressed with the standard of the housing. I could immediately see that each member, young and old, worked harmoniously together to create a clean, safe environment. The women took care of the cleaning and cooking and treated us like royal guests with their banquet of simple, yet delicious Syrian cuisine. Simultaneously the teenage girls helped caring for the children while using their creative skills to create art works that would put their western contemporaries to shame. I was especially captivated with the unique concept of artwork created by twirling small strips of colored paper to form a collage of perfectly placed geometric pieces on a canvas to form a stunning three dimensional piece of art. They were true masterpieces!

The education facility in this center was also of impressive standard, namely the dedication and determination of the students. One of the students recounted to us how he taught himself English using YouTube videos and a free online app. This is an ideology driven deeply home when reflecting on our own youth who can barely manage to stay awake at lessons because they are so tired from partying over the weekend. Have we made life too easy for our own youth to the point that they don't value their own education? The example of these Syrian young people who lost nearly 10 years of their education and have to fight to make it in our modern world is a clear answer to this question!

In conclusion, I greatly admire and respect Paul and his team for what they have accomplished and would highly recommend them to anyone who is interested in investing in the future of this wonderful planet we share! I am honored to have the opportunity to support his work and look forward to many more years of successful collaboration with Human Action Int.

Thank you, Paul Viola for all that you have done and for the opportunity to experience it firsthand!

Michel Steiner

Director of Sponsorship Network Intl.

