

Love Thy Neighbor



Helping The Victims Of War

by John L. McCullough

(NAPSA)—Any war and its aftermath require humanitarian attention and the war in Afghanistan is no different.



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There will be a need for assistance from relief agencies such as Church World Service, and the needs in Afghanistan will be acute because even before the U.S. air war began in October,

Afghanistan was suffering from the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet.

It is difficult to imagine a more vulnerable place than Afghanistan.

Three years of drought have decimated many rural areas, causing thousands to flee to refugee camps within the country. "People have been whittled down," said one humanitarian worker assessing the situation in Afghanistan. "They are hanging by a thread."

The statistics bear this out.

Afghanistan has the worst infant mortality rate in the world—161 deaths per 1,000 births, according to the United Nations. Life expectancy averages a mere 46 years.

Among the causes? Besides the drought, they include endemic poverty and poor infrastructure after two decades of war. Even before Sept. 11, a full fifth of the nation—more than five million people—were dependent on outside food assistance.

CWS was already working inside Afghanistan prior to the current conflict. Our medical program in Jalalabad has been widely praised for its compassionate care of those suffering from the effects of the drought.

In October, CWS undertook a \$6.3 million program of emergency food and shelter for 17,000 uprooted Afghan families—119,000 people—in central and northern Afghanistan and in Pakistan, where at least two million are refugees.

By January, we'd reached 6,000 internally displaced families inside Afghanistan and 3,000 refugee families in Pakistan.

In addition, we're helping more than 400 Afghan refugee women support themselves and their children in an innovative project to make 60,000 quilts for other refugee families. Many of the quilts are being used in our shelter kits. The United Nations is also purchasing our quilts for use in its emergency programs.

Behind the numbers are the experiences of real people—women like Qamer, 55, a widow, who arrived penniless in the border city of Quetta, Pakistan, late in 2001.

Qamer joined the ranks of the "invisible refugees" in Pakistan—those fleeing Afghanistan but not registered with Pakistani authorities—because they fear being deported back to Afghanistan.

Local religious leaders found shelter for Qamer, and she is supporting herself and her four children making CWS quilts for other refugees.

With your help, Qamer and other CWS quiltmakers will be able to do more than survive. Their quiltmaking has the ability to empower these women—something that can lead to a more peaceful future for all of Afghanistan.

John L. McCullough is CWS Executive Director. To learn more about CWS work, call 1-800-297-1516 or visit the CWS Web site at www.churchworldservice.org.