



Christian  
World Service



# Christmas

## Disaster strikes and we come with Food

When a local member of ACT Alliance Lebanon first came to her door with hot food, Karma gave thanks to God. Days after the Beirut explosion had blown out her windows and pushed her from her chair into the wall, she was desperate. The pair are now dependent on the help of others. Thanks to her neighbours, plastic sheeting covers the window frames of her tiny apartment where she lives with her disabled son. Local church people deliver hot food to her three times a week and her neighbours help when they can.

Across town Palestinian and Syrian young people at the Dbayeh Refugee Camp felt the explosion and started to talk. The next day they contacted Elias Habib, the Department of Service to Palestinian (DSPR) youth leader and demanded to help. Within a short while, he got agreement and began to organise the [clean-up teams](#). He gathered protective gear and tools for the groups. At first they joined other teams cleaning up the streets.

Director Sylvia Haddad says, “The sight was very beautiful. Many people were working to clean up the mess but the second stage that was the hard one. The youth teams began to work on the homes, some apartments that were 30 or more stories up with no electricity or lifts. They had to climb up and down the stairs. The young people were very motivated. They were working from their hearts to help people.”

Months after the August explosion she says the young people are one of the few groups still



*Local knowledge means ACT Alliance members can help when disaster strikes. Ninety year old Karma and her 65 year old disabled son receive hot meals three times a week in their badly damaged apartment.*

working. They won't forget this experience that is building bridges between the refugee and Lebanese communities as well as providing practical help to some of the poorest people.

Cleaning up is not all that DSPR Lebanon is doing. The explosions added to Lebanon's economic and political troubles. In its aftermath Covid-19 is spreading quickly. Many families are in desperate need of food and hygiene items. DSPR Lebanon and ACT Alliance are distributing food and vouchers to keep them going. The collapse in the Lebanese currency is making this harder.

“We can help people because we are on the ground and we know people and their condition,” Sylvia adds. She says other non-governmental organisations are asking them to distribute funds because of these links.

“Cash is always best. We do not want to bomb people with lentils and rice, and then spaghetti. The only problem is getting enough cash to meet all the needs,” she concludes.

Christmas comes not once a year, but whenever and wherever people share what they can with those in need.

**Support the 2020 Christmas Appeal to give hungry families good food and the basics of a sustainable life.**

## Lebanon

*Written by Sylvia Haddad, DSPR Lebanon*

Two years ago, life was rather good in Lebanon. Life was flowing with people living within their communities according to their traditions, beliefs and ambitions. There is a large refugee community which needed to be helped and we were doing our best to help and serve them.

In general, people led a normal kind of traditional life and then- three major events in the last year changed all that and lead to the very difficult days we are living today.

Actually discontent had been brewing slowly for a number of years as people were becoming increasingly frustrated and angry with the government’s failure to provide even the most basic of services - electricity, safe drinking water, healthcare, trash removal or good internet service.

Many blamed the ruling elite who have dominated politics for years while failing to carry out the sweeping reforms necessary to solve the country’s problems.

In the beginning of October 2019, a shortage of foreign currency led the Lebanese pound to start losing its value against the US dollar. A black market emerged for the first time in decades. Importers of essential materials such as wheat and fuel demanded to be paid in dollars.



*ACT Alliance Lebanon staff and volunteers organise food and hygiene packs for families.*

In order to collect more revenue, the government proposed new taxes on tobacco, petrol, and WhatsApp voice calls in mid-October. This unleashed a surge of discontent.

On October 17, protests cut across sectarian lines all over the country as tens of thousands took to the streets – leading to the resignation of the government.

Meanwhile, the devalued currency led to the closure of thousands of businesses, drastically increasing the unemployment rate. Already a third of the population was living below the poverty line while unemployment stood at 25%.

To add to our problems, a killer pandemic hit the world.

In mid-March, the Covid-19 virus appeared in Lebanon which lead to lockdowns in the country resulting in more closures of businesses and more losses of jobs.





*Rocked by disaster, the people of Beirut are struggling with new trauma and facing an uncertain future. Life will not be the same for many as the country faces the economic and political crisis.*

Our economic crisis increased and the gap between the Lebanese pound's value on the official exchange rate and the black-market exchange rates widened. Banks tightened their capital controls. Prices rose further preventing many families from buying even the most basics of needs.

Lebanon was on the brink of a major food crisis.

And then on August 4, the huge explosion ripped through central Beirut, blowing out windows across the city, flipping cars and damaging buildings near and far. Hundreds of thousands became homeless in seconds as the explosion wave went through Beirut's historic quarters, causing destruction and reaching the outskirts of the city. The explosion was felt in Cyprus hundreds of miles away.

To date this blast has killed 220 people, wounded at least 6,000, while still there are missing people. Approximately 300,000 people were left homeless and the damage estimated to be between US\$10 and \$15 billion.

The blast came at a very difficult and crucial time when Lebanon was trying to control the spread of Covid-19 and deal with an unprecedented economic crisis, which was pushing thousands of people into poverty.

During all this, DSPR Lebanon continued with its work. To protect against Covid-19, the centres were sanitised, and we have begun teaching online. We sent our Syrian students to Syria for their official exams observing quarantine rules and we are proud of their 90% success in their baccalaureate exams. Our numerous other programmes continued as much as possible with social distancing and other protection measures.

Life became harder as more and more people lost their jobs and poverty increased. Many families were in desperate need of food and other essentials. Our appeals to partners (including CWS) gave us funds to distribute food and hygiene vouchers in four of the camps benefitting hundreds of families. We also helped numerous Non-governmental organisations, local and international, distribute food, hygiene materials and other household needs. We can help them because we are on the ground and we know people and their condition.

The explosion happened as we were busy helping and hoping for more support. As the dust began to settle and people realised what had happened, thousands ran down to the scene to see how they could help. It is important to note the civil society of all religions has proved they are great. The DSPR Lebanon youth group of Dbayeh camp immediately ran to their leader, Elias Habib, insisting he take them to go and help. And that is what he did.

Indeed every helping hand was needed. The rubble, the falling stones, the broken windows, the uprooted trees, the destroyed historic homes, the

damaged hospitals and schools and the people under the rubble.

Thousands of people and hundreds of NGOs local and international hurried to help. And all are really helping. I don't know what people would have done without them. The area of destruction is extensive. Our youth volunteer group have worked very, very hard clearing houses, carrying rubble and helping people with whatever they needed. Distributing food vouchers is next on their list. I think it is an experience these young volunteers will never forget

## Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees

The Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) started in 1948 as an ad-hoc ecumenical group made up of international and local clergy and lay people, tending to the trauma of over 726,000 Palestinian refugees from the first Arab-Israeli war. DSPR eventually evolved into five Area Committees one each in Jerusalem or the West Bank; Jordan; Lebanon; Galilee and the Gaza Strip coordinated through a Central Office that has been located in East Jerusalem since 1997. DSPR was initially registered in Cyprus in 1970, where members met regularly from the region, and became part of the MECC when it was established in 1974.

DSPR seeks to foster and advance the socio-economic conditions of the refugees and marginalised through the provision of health, education, economic, social and humanitarian programmes in keeping with the exercise of basic human rights.

DSPR Lebanon has a special focus on education. Starting with preschool, it organises education for every age group including mothers who have arrived from Syria unable to read and for those wanting to learn agricultural skills at their model farm at Tyre.

Graduates of the agricultural programme have been able to find jobs or start their own businesses. Every Tuesday some of the workers take the rich variety of produce to the market at the German Church in Beirut. They grow many types of vegetables, olives and citrus organically.

In 2018, staff added honey production to their offerings.

### Husam's story

Husam Ali, a Palestinian refugee, lives in the Buss Camp for Palestinian refugees in the South of Lebanon where farming is one of the main sources of income. Husam got a degree in accounting from the Arab University and opened his own stationery store. But the store did not do well and he was forced to close. He turned to the only alternative he had. He started to work on a number of farms to earn enough wages to raise his four children.

With the increasing needs of the family, which included responsibility for his elderly parents, Husam was always on the lookout for more work. The Beekeeping course that DSPR Lebanon was about to run on its nearby farm



*DSPR Lebanon has added a popular beekeeping course to its programme, helping graduates earn new income.*

caught his interest. He was one of the first to register. Husam found bee life was very interesting and that honey making could be an additional source of income for him.

At the end of the course, he was very happy that he along with the other graduates received a protective costume worn by beekeepers, a bee smoker gadget and three frames covered with bees within their wooden hives. Under the guidance of DSPR Lebanon, he was able to set up his hives on a small rented plot of land, implementing what he had learned. Husam now has his own business which has grown to include 13 boxes of honey producing bees. He is selling his honey and is happy to have this much needed extra income to feed his family.

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