**Syria: “When we arrived at the hospital, they put me in handcuffs and said, ‘Let him die’”**

**As fighting intensifies to control the city of Raqqa, the city’s residents are once again caught in the middle. During six years of war, they have suffered bombing, fighting, persecution and public beheadings. Thousands have risked their lives to cross checkpoints and minefields to reach safer areas. Many of Syrian living in Al Raqqa fled the town in early 2013 when fighting and airstrikes started in the combats between the opposition groups and the armies of the Government of Syria. In recent years with ISIS in control of the city and airstrikes almost daily hammering the city it became harder for people to flee but yet, for many, difficult to stay. Thirty-five-year-old Raqqa resident Mohammed describes his tortuous journey to escape, the people who helped him along the way, and the terrible price paid by his family.**

Northern Syria, February 2017, “Living in Raqqa city, with the frontlines getting closer to Raqqa and airstrikes on the city, I planned to escape.

One day, while I was working in a market, someone told me that if I wanted to run away, I should go and hide near some farmer’s tents, and then continue north.

The very next day, I took my wife and four children and went to where the farmers were camped. We slept there that night, people there provided us with food. The next day, we found a car to take us towards the area controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). I agreed to give the driver 100,000 Syrian Pounds [440 Euros] – all the money I had – to smuggle us there. But he left us soon on the roadside and drove off.

After a while, I saw an old man and a woman riding a motorcycle. They were coming in our direction – they were planning to escape too. I stopped them, asking for help. The man gave me their motorcycle to ferry my children north to the SDF checkpoint. I set off with my elder son and my daughter while the rest of the family followed on foot. We had gone about 100 meters when the motorcycle hit a mine.

My wife screamed and ran to us. My son was unconscious and had injuries to his forehead; my daughter had injuries to her eyes; I was injured in my chin, neck and hands. I picked up my son and my wife held our daughter. We waited for a car – any car – to come along the road. I watched my son dying in my arms. He died, and I was forced to leave his body there.

I was on the point of passing out when a car drove past and took us to a doctor in the village of Mazra’t Tishrin [23 km northwest of Raqqa city]. The doctor told us we needed to get to hospital, so we returned to the Raqqa city.

When we arrived at the Raqqa hospital, a member of Islamic State (ISIS) refused to admit me. Even though I was bleeding, they put me in handcuffs and said, ’Let him die’. After two hours, I gestured to a doctor to come and treat me – I wasn’t able to talk because of the blood flowing from my neck. But the doctor cried and didn’t come. I think he was afraid that if he didn’t follow orders, he would be killed.

After a while, a commander came and told the doctor to treat me, and I was taken into the operating theatre. Just then an injured IS member was brought in, and the doctor was called away to treat him. But after a short while, he came back and completed my treatment, apologizing, and asking me not to reveal that I was treated by him. Doctors are so afraid of here.

I stayed in the hospital for three days. The doctor came and asked how I was, and when he saw that I was poor, he gave me some money.

After a few days I returned home and went back to work in the market. People got to hear my story – how my son had died and my daughter was injured. A man came to the market and offered his help to get me to a safer area in the north I wasn’t sure if I should trust this person or not, but he gave me his address and told me not to worry. He swore that he would get my family there safely and for free.

At first I was scared to trust him but, the following day; we went to the promised location at a certain time. He drove us out of the city, avoiding several checkpoints. We stopped at his mother’s home for a while. I told his mother my story and she cried and told me that I was like her son. She asked her son to make sure my family reaches the SDF checkpoint safely. When it was dark, we got back in the car, he turned the headlights off and we drove towards the checkpoint.

As we approached, they shot two bullets into the air. We stopped, and then they gave us a sign by torchlight to proceed. Thank God there were no mines on the road and we reached Al Khineizat checkpoint safely. When we did, I burst into tears.

We finally arrived to a camp in northern Syria. We’ve been living in the camp here for a month. The camp is safe but I’m in a bad financial situation. Sometimes I get some work to earn a little money, but my daughter needs to see an eye surgeon and my fractured finger and chin need to be followed up too.

When the situation stabilizes in Raqqa city, I may go back there, since at least my home is there and it is where I was born.”

MSF teams support nine health facilities in the districts of Ayn Al Arab/Kobane, Tal Abyad and Manbij, and provides healthcare at a clinic in Ayn Issa, some 50 km north of the Raqqa city, for people who have fled their homes due to the violent conflict.

ENDS

Names have been changed.