

Dear Donors,

Happy New Year!

I want to give you an update on my trip to Lesbos. I was there from the 24/12/2015 until the 02/01/2016. It was a very moving and exciting experience.

A few figures for 2015:

- Over 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe by sea (<http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>)

- 750,000 of which arrived via Greece through the Aegean Sea, and 500,000 did so via the island of Lesbos

<https://www.google.ie/maps/place/Lesbos,+Greece/@39.1761927,21.7354509,6z/data=!4m2!3m1!1s0x14af8516edc7f755:0x8627d601b32663e7?hl=en>

- These statistics

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=060f9ee3fd&view=att&th=151fcebce3d276a&attid=0.1&disp=inline&safe=1&zw> show that the average daily number of arrivals in Lesbos in December 2015 was 1,900; in November 2015 was 3,400.

- They also show that over 85% of all arrivals in Lesbos were from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, that is, three countries in which there is an armed conflict.

- 40% were men, 34% women and 20% children.

See also this EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre daily map

<https://www.facebook.com/elenijelina.bouboussis.94/posts/10153213723351497> as of 8 December 2015, made up of from ECHO, ESRI, UNHCR, OCHA

Lesbos is, therefore, the main entry points for refugees into the European Union.

Refugees go to Turkey and, in Istanbul, make contact with the smugglers who will arrange their sea crossing to Lesbos island (or other smaller islands such as Chios, Kos, Samos). After spending a few days in the island, they are transported by ferry to Athens. From there, Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans travel northwards towards Germany, Sweden etc. The others, are stuck in Greece. This short \*video <http://qz.com/589235/this-photographer-traveled-by-raft-with-refugees-headed-to-europe/%3E> \*gives a little context.

Boats arrive Lesbos Island mostly at night and in the early hours of the morning. Refugees travel at night, not because they want, but because the smugglers tell them to. They travel in inflatable dinghy boats, packed to the brim. Ordinarily, the sea crossing should not take more than 2h 30m or 3 hours, but refugees in one boat told me they'd been in the sea for 6h/7h. Over 800 drowned trying to cross the Aegean Sea last year.

The boats arrive on the North Coast or on the South Coast of Lesbos. Groups of volunteers and NGOs cover the whole length of the coast. They assist in receiving the boats safely onto the shore. UNHCR staff and buses and a mobile unit of Doctors Without Borders are on 24-hour shifts. A UNHCR bus will take the refugees to Moria Refugee Camp

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=060f9ee3fd&view=att&th=1521cff7af5162a4&attid=0.2&disp=inline&safe=1&zw> to be registered. All refugees are accommodated there except Syrian and Iraqi families, who are brought to Kara Tepé Camp

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=060f9ee3fd&view=att&th=1521cff7af5162a4&attid=0.1&disp=inline&safe=1&zw> . The Camps are less than 5km from the capital Mitilini. I was staying in Panagiouda

<https://www.google.ie/maps/dir/Moria+Refugee+Camp,+Lesbos+Prefecture,+Greece/Panagiouda,+Greece/Kara+Tepe,+Thermis+rd,+Mitilini+811+00/Mytilene,+Greece/@39.1244526,26.4629032,12z/data=!4m26!4m25!1m5!1m1!1s0x14ba6128480ebf8b:0x812377b0400a2b2f!2m2!1d26.5042383!2d39.133192!1m5!1m1!1s0x14ba66b81ad924bf:0x500bd2ce2baf5b0!2m2!1d26.5286711!2d39.1448113!1m5!1m1!1s0x14ba66e439d57043:0x812fdc1f7368c02d!2m2!1d26.544572!2d39.1287349!1m5!1m1!1s0x14ba6709fc60bb23:0xede02401c8716d5b!2m2!1d26.560706!2d39.104023!3e0?hl=en> , which is located between the two camps.

The reception/conditions at the two refugee camps are not ideal, and in the case of Moria are plainly appalling. There were sufficient Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) in Kara Tepé, but not enough in Moria, where many slept in tents (bought by volunteers and NGOs) or rough, with only a sleeping bag. The RHUs however did not have mattresses, electricity or heating.

I spent the first night on duty at Kara Tepé Camp, with two other volunteers. We welcomed a group of 40 to 50 refugees who had just landed, gave them a bite to eat, gave them blankets, shoes, etc, and showed them to the RHUs. They were exhausted and happy to get something warm and a place to sleep after a treacherous journey.

The rest of the nights I spent them keeping watch for boats at the Katia Lookout point on the most southern part of the south Mitilini coast. There were a number of other volunteers covering the area from the Airport to St George's Chapel. The atmosphere between the volunteers and the NGOs was very positive. Everybody worked with one common goal, to try to help in receiving the refugees.

When the boats would enter Greek waters the refugees start flashing their mobile phones to indicate their location, or to ask for help. Volunteers on the Greek coast flash back and try to point to a safe landing area. The volunteers communicate via Whatsapp any incoming arrivals or landings or need for medical assistance etc.

Volunteers get into the water and pull the boat safely onto the shore. The boats are packed to the brim with persons of all ages, from new-borns to elderly, men, women and children. Some arrive happy and excited about having completed the journey safely. Many are traumatised and in shock. Some cry, some faint, some cannot utter a word. They all arrived cold and wet. Often they have thrown all their bags into the sea and arrive with nothing. They are given blankets, a warm welcome, shoes and socks, before being taken to Moria Refugee Camp. A book could be written about the anecdotes, some very emotional, others just surreal, all life-enhancing,

Thank you for your extraordinarily generous donations, which amounted to €1,282. Before I went to Greece, I contacted a number of local NGOs to ask them for advice on what might be needed. I was told by \*Eleni Bouboussis

<https://www.facebook.com/elenijelina.bouboussis.94?fref=ts> \*, of the Chios Island Eastern Shore Rescue Team, that \*Team Humanity <https://www.facebook.com/TeamHumanityDK/> \*, in Lesvos, could use \*6 powerful LED Lenses\* for their work on the North Coast and in the South Coast of Lesvos in receiving refugee/migrants boats. The Lenses/Torches would help ensure the safe landing and disembarkation of the refugees. I purchased the 6 LED Lenses [https://gm1.ggpht.com/1odKfIGj-rwifaSG1sfEv4xb3rhIZU13d-q6\\_0QGtgjsaP276-8R64LRSRdVBuXX2J-WrABqIMjYKokHmXue5lyc7eTv3N4TFI5x3lpURfQkLLWSRScP5OfVIAdmJNjZP75uDJ9RxKjLGvLME1CZUrOo5qd2KkymBnvL0w4SlcddrWafRWrE8pbanwesImAAAJq1DRI6RSdazgeAsJjur0gYxM6Ke\\_08rwtgU\\_Dlw0n00qbJd451zo7wSUEcDsZz21BaHrE1CYmKdabs4S3ryfGXUBt5px9QpVqsaO9yCv1JwlczB6o0mDzOrvYPGw5Wkyw1BV0ZVGuVBMm\\_sCVKoNflnp2utFyfLjIZ1uyctTZBWsdjx\\_J44-HyhGuDvx\\_BxAFpc2o3iwKjNW4IGIOdR-3dysqSwHmtr086mx6rMHUGDqTdDIEc92DohfalUTjIDK0p3MfUxOqB-T6AeOOwaPUMPu95JpW81m0a2JSU6qcS7Pfq\\_aAqGV0BqZAuDLbEZ4c9XY-wfGDOOQpzzq3EM-IPB\\_kp91fz7qfvuuujDqaMEPI5L\\_wvVR4HT\\_Jr0FO-OSrNLkSzr9463-kiN5quFfjU-B5RO93H9EU6zmcK1xbxNvlGePa1N7BTBKvw1BR1iv2ZA4utW7JQlvdXyKNUIVz0ldzqcKWdMcxLIRvfNz3aA=w944-h532-l75-ft](https://gm1.ggpht.com/1odKfIGj-rwifaSG1sfEv4xb3rhIZU13d-q6_0QGtgjsaP276-8R64LRSRdVBuXX2J-WrABqIMjYKokHmXue5lyc7eTv3N4TFI5x3lpURfQkLLWSRScP5OfVIAdmJNjZP75uDJ9RxKjLGvLME1CZUrOo5qd2KkymBnvL0w4SlcddrWafRWrE8pbanwesImAAAJq1DRI6RSdazgeAsJjur0gYxM6Ke_08rwtgU_Dlw0n00qbJd451zo7wSUEcDsZz21BaHrE1CYmKdabs4S3ryfGXUBt5px9QpVqsaO9yCv1JwlczB6o0mDzOrvYPGw5Wkyw1BV0ZVGuVBMm_sCVKoNflnp2utFyfLjIZ1uyctTZBWsdjx_J44-HyhGuDvx_BxAFpc2o3iwKjNW4IGIOdR-3dysqSwHmtr086mx6rMHUGDqTdDIEc92DohfalUTjIDK0p3MfUxOqB-T6AeOOwaPUMPu95JpW81m0a2JSU6qcS7Pfq_aAqGV0BqZAuDLbEZ4c9XY-wfGDOOQpzzq3EM-IPB_kp91fz7qfvuuujDqaMEPI5L_wvVR4HT_Jr0FO-OSrNLkSzr9463-kiN5quFfjU-B5RO93H9EU6zmcK1xbxNvlGePa1N7BTBKvw1BR1iv2ZA4utW7JQlvdXyKNUIVz0ldzqcKWdMcxLIRvfNz3aA=w944-h532-l75-ft) at the Outdoor Adventure and the Great Outdoors shops (please find \*attached\* the two receipts). The lenses were very powerful (320 lumens, 260metres). Each lens cost €80 and so the total cost was €480. One shop only had five of them, so I bought the sixth one in the other shop. I gave the lenses to \*Aris Vlahopoulos <https://www.facebook.com/aris.vlahopoulos?fref=ts> \*, a local from Petra, Lesvos, and a member of the Team Humanity. Please see two photographs \*attached\* and this \*Facebook entry <https://www.facebook.com/elenijelina.bouboussis.94/posts/10153213723351497> \*

I asked a number of people how best to use the remaining €802 you donated. I was advised that the best thing to do would be to use the money to pay for transport and medical expenses of the most vulnerable refugees, who might not have enough funds to pay for their ongoing

travel or for medical needs. Aris suggested that I contacted \*Pikpa <https://www.facebook.com/pikpalesvos/?fref=ts> \*, a self-organised refugee camp near the airport, which looks after the most vulnerable refugees. Pkpa has no access to any state or European funds. It has hosted more than 6.000 refugees, some for few days and others up to a year. The refugees include asylum and family unification applicants and/or vulnerable groups of newly arrived refugees e.g. people with disabilities, sick, pregnant etc. Pikpa offers food, clothes, medicines, hygiene, legal counselling, and medical help. Occasionally, it assists refugees with their transport expenses and medical/social expenses.

I met with \*Efi Latsoudi <https://www.facebook.com/efi.latsoudi?fref=ts> \*, who more or less “runs” the project (really, the wonderful thing about many of these projects and volunteers’ work is the spontaneous and anarchic way in which they operate; extremely flexible and open). \*Pikpa\* confirmed there was indeed a need for funds to support some of their residents with travel and/or medical expenses and undertook to identify suitable recipients. I had the privilege to meet the first family who benefitted from your money: a Syrian family made up of a widow (whose husband had been killed two years previously), her two children under 7, and her mother who had a heart condition. I \*attach \*a copy of the receipt from Pikpa. I have asked them to inform me of future recipients.

I visited the two refugee camps every day and spoke with 15 different refugees and families, from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Guinea and Morocco. They all kindly told me their stories of flight, and their hopes for the future. They had one thing in common: to flee war and violence, to find refuge and peace, to ensure an education for the children etc.

I also interviewed the manager of Kara Tepé Camp and representatives of various NGOs. I think managed to get an overall understanding of how Lesvos is trying to cope with the refugee crisis. It is not easy. But the goodwill of virtually everyone is extraordinary.

A group from Limerick asked me to deliver 23 baby snow-suits, which were given to Samaritan Purse <http://www.samaritanpurse.org/> an American NGO which is distributing Non-Food Items (clothes, shoes, blankets, sleeping bags etc) at Moria Camp.

The most rewarding aspect of my trip was to have the privilege to welcome the refugees to Europe; to witness their resilience, their fears, and their hopes; to hear their stories; and to feel valued for it. Meeting and working with volunteers from all over the world was also an extremely enriching and fulfilling experience, particularly getting to know many European Muslims who had a special affinity and interest in helping their brothers and sisters in faith and who sincerely appreciated the help from other non-Muslim volunteers. We were brought together by our human desire to help our fellow brothers. I was especially touched by their friendship and loyalty.

I would like to return to Lesbos in the future, as it looks like the refugees will continue to arrive throughout 2016. There are still an estimated 4 million Syrian refugees alone living in neighbouring countries. Armed conflicts continue to destroy the civil society and social fabric of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. Not to mention the serious human rights and security problems in many other countries <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/10/refugee-crisis-apart-from-syrians-who-else-is-travelling-to-europe> , such as Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, which force thousands to flee every year.

The EU has approved an EU Relocation Scheme which aims to relocate 160,000 refugees [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_eu\\_solidarity\\_a\\_refugee\\_relocation\\_system\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_eu_solidarity_a_refugee_relocation_system_en.pdf) from Greece and Italy over the next two years, to reduce the burden on these two countries. Ireland has undertaken to take up to 4,000 refugees <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR15000463> under the said Scheme. A Syrian family of 10 <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/family-of-10-first-syrian-refugees-to-relocate-to-irheland-370860.html> were the first to arrive last month. I hope people will not be scared by some disturbing events concerning refugees and immigrants, but will accept that 99% of them are peace-loving, law-abiding persons who only desire to live in peace and security and to provide a better future for their families and children.

Thank you for your generous support and encouragement. I also want to thank in particular Antonio Fernando of Lingua Translation Services Ltd <http://www.linguatranslationservices.com/contact.php> , who kindly offered the services of his company and of interpreters with whom he works, and of Bobby Healy and Simon Ward of CarTrawler <http://cartrawler.com/> , who offered to sponsor the rental of car in Lesbos to transport refugees if it became necessary.

Best wishes,

Albert

\*How Your Money Was Spent\*

\*NGO\*

\*Concept\*

\*Amount\*

Team Humanity

6 LED Lenses / Torches

€480.00

Pipka

Most Vulnerable Refugees' Transport & Medical Expenses

€802.00

TOTAL

€1,282.00