

# PARTNERSHIP



SUMMER 2016



## WORKING TOGETHER *FOR...*

# Assalamu Alaikum

PEACE UNTO ALL OF YOU

The past year at Islamic Relief USA has been one of expansion in several new directions, together with you.

We've been working together for marginalized people. Social injustice is not just outside our borders. It affects people of all backgrounds, across many states. We've been working with friends on Native American reservations, inner cities and rural areas.

We've been working together for the voiceless—speaking out for **Syrians** and for the world's women at the White House, on Capitol Hill, and at the United Nations.

We've been working together to bring food to the hungry—in Iraq, **Yemen**, Palestine, Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan and many more countries, and for refugees far from their homes as well.

We've been working together for health—strengthening health systems in Pakistan, bringing emergency care to Rohingya camps in **Myanmar**, and fighting ebola in Guinea.

We've been working together to bring water to those who need it, from **Ethiopia** to Albania to **Flint, Michigan**.

We've been working together to bring shelter and other basic necessities to survivors of emergencies—to displaced people in Iraq, up remote mountains after Pakistan's earthquake, and to survivors of storms and floods in South Carolina, Texas and Louisiana.

We've been working together to help people build businesses and improve their lives. These projects include vocational training in Gaza, agribusiness support in Pakistan and South Sudan, and truly innovative projects like one in **Bangladesh** that you'll read about later in this magazine.

We've been working together for orphans—more than 15,000 young people around the world.

We've been working together with you and with other good-hearted people of all faiths and backgrounds, for the goal of serving our brothers and sisters in humanity in some of the most difficult times of their lives.

Please enjoy the stories and photos on the pages that follow, brought to you from four continents. I hope you enjoy this look at the work you've been doing for a better world.

Anwar Ahmad Khan

Anwar Ahmad Khan  
Chief Executive Officer • Islamic Relief USA



12. SYRIA



19. YEMEN



24. MYANMAR



36. ETHIOPIA



6. FLINT, MICHIGAN



32. BANGLADESH



CEO Anwar Khan looks from Greece toward the shore of Turkey, surrounded by refugees' life jackets, in September 2015.

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Photographs © Islamic Relief



A 3-year-old girl sits on the Ramadan food package her grandmother received on the Goshute reservation in Utah last year. Read more, Page 28.



## ABOUT ISLAMIC RELIEF USA

**VISION**

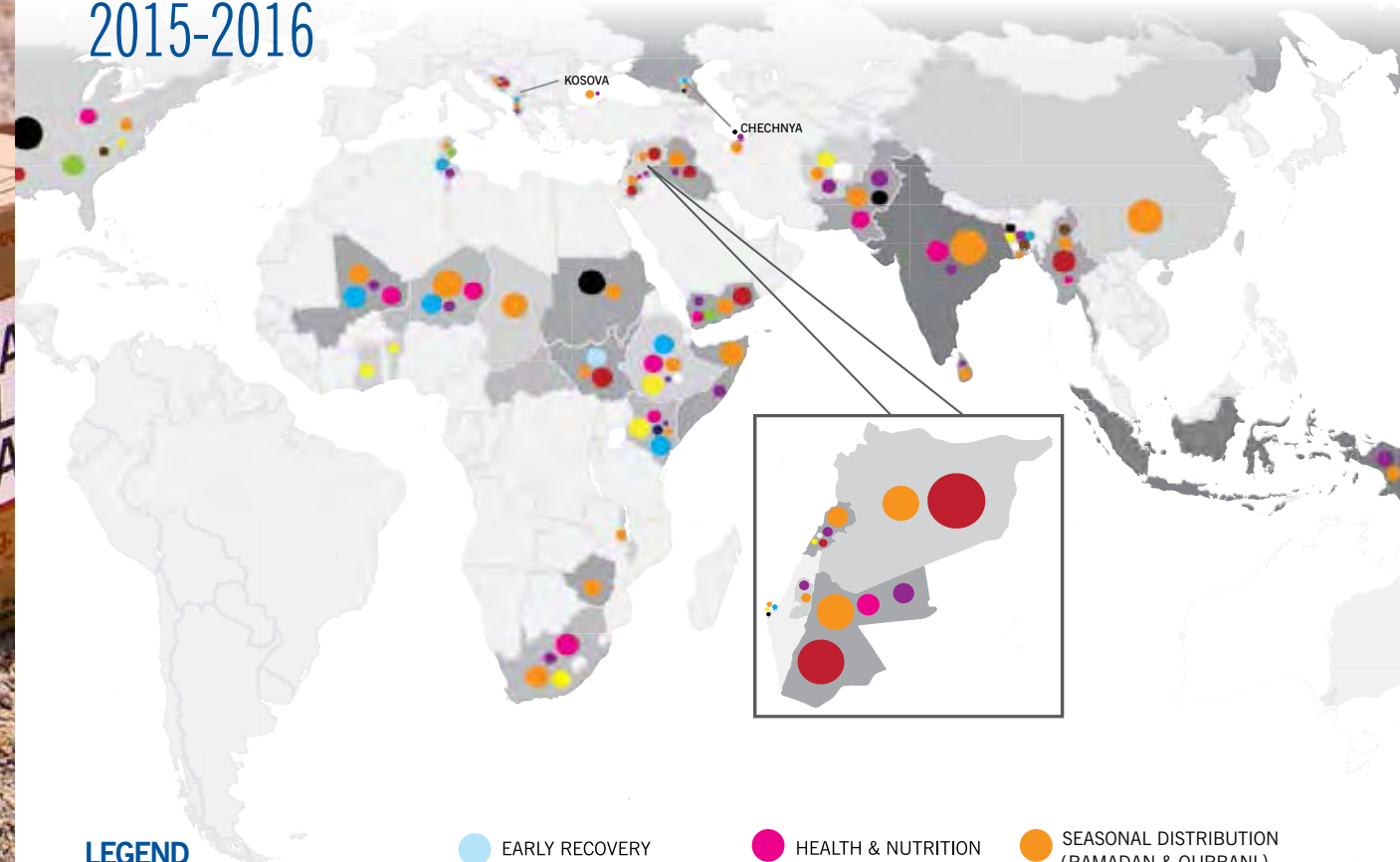
Working together for a world free of poverty

**MISSION**

Islamic Relief USA provides relief and development in a dignified manner regardless of gender, race, or religion, and works to empower individuals in their communities and give them a voice in the world.



## AROUND THE WORLD 2015-2016



**LEGEND**

- |                                |                      |   |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| ● EARLY RECOVERY               | ● HEALTH & NUTRITION | ● SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION (RAMADAN & QURBANI) |
| ● ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT         | ● ORPHAN SPONSORSHIP | ● SHELTERS & SETTLEMENTS                    |
| ● AGRICULTURAL & FOOD SECURITY | ● EDUCATION          | ● PROTECTION                                |
| ● DISASTER RISK REDUCTION      | ● EMERGENCY RESPONSE | ● REHABILITATION                            |
|                                |                      | ● WATER, SANITATION, & HYGIENE              |

\* DOTS REPRESENT PROJECTS DONE WITHIN THE COUNTRY NOTED, BUT LOCATIONS ARE NOT EXACT. SIZE OF DOTS REPRESENTS SIZE OF BENEFICIARY POPULATION; LARGER DOTS INDICATE MORE PEOPLE SERVED IN THAT PROJECT CATEGORY.

FACES OF FLINT



Marsha is forced to pay \$70.76 to pipe water to her house—water she and her husband will not even touch.

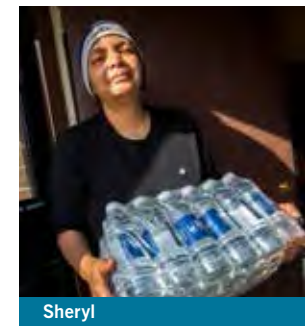
“It’s horrible that you can’t use your own water,” she said. “You can’t even give the water to your pets.”

She and her son Rodric use bottled water for everything—drinking, cooking,

even bathing. Rodric said the water from their faucet was so dirty that it made him itch. They’re afraid to touch it now.

They appreciated the water IRUSA’s team handed them during the winter.

“I want to thank you for coming to Flint, Michigan, and rescuing us,” Marsha said. “Thank you so very much.”

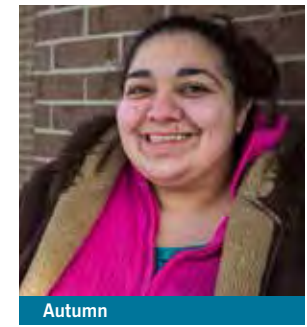


“When they first changed it over, I was going to boil some water to cook some food and it was a white ring around the water—you could just tell there was something in the water. ... But they still said it was safe. Come to find out there was lead in it.

“It’s real hard to cook, to bathe. ... Now that I have a little bit [of water], I have to try to ration it out to figure what’s best to do. We gotta eat. But taking a bath, it’s just really hard.

“[The bottled water] is helping but it’s just a Band-Aid because we’re gonna need water for a long time. What’s the solution? I don’t know what we do.

“I’m just hoping that something can be done soon about the pipes, that they can be fixed. But I know it’s an ongoing process and it’s a whole bunch of red tape. ... So we need some help here.”



“I have a 9-year-old and an 18-month-old ... it’s scary. You don’t know how it’s going to affect your kids. You don’t know if there’s going to be future consequences.

Anything helps. We go through so much water. ... Everything you do, you take for granted when you have it.

It’s a relief to us to be able to have the donations ... Being in the dark so long

about it and then just being hit with it—we had no time for preparation so it’s wonderful to have the extra help. It’s amazing.

I think that everybody’s really scared of what’s going on here, and it is scary, but in Flint ... we just cope and move on and we just find ways to get around it. Flint is a strong community. No matter how impoverished the area is, it’s a strong community, and everybody pulls together.



“It’s just real sad,” Maurice said. “We don’t deserve this. We don’t deserve it at all. The kids can’t take no showers, can’t take no baths.”

Maurice stopped using the water from his faucet when he realized it was making his skin itch. Now he’s using bottled water for everything, so he was glad to open his door and find IRUSA’s team holding out a case of it.

“It’s helping a lot because a lot of

people don’t have water, and a lot of elderly people don’t have any way to get around to get water. So by you all coming out, that makes it a lot better, for the elderly especially.

“We appreciate everybody for what they’re doing, and ... I want to say thank you for those people that don’t. It’s a blessing and I appreciate it very much.

“Like I said, it’s just a sad situation. ... But we’re trying to make it. We’re gonna make it.”

Social activist Linda Sarsour (below left) and other volunteers deliver water with IRUSA’s team in Flint, Michigan, in February 2016.



VOLUNTEERS DELIVER WATER DOOR-TO-DOOR IN FLINT, MICHIGAN

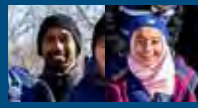
When the water turned toxic in Flint, Michigan, IRUSA volunteers came together from places near and far to carry clean, safe water to residents’ doorsteps.

At the beginning of 2016, news broke nationwide about dangerously high lead levels in Flint’s water. In 2014, Flint had switched its water source to the Flint River. The corrosive river water caused lead to leach out of the pipes and into the water flowing into residents’ homes. Residents began noticing that the water irritated their skin, even gave them sores. Respiratory infections spread. The deeper effects emerged later—lead poisoning in the children, which causes irreversible damage like lower IQ and behavioral problems.

IRUSA’s Disaster Response Team responded by bringing clean water to Flint residents, in coordination with the American Red Cross. Over six weeks in January to February, more than 500 IRUSA volunteers delivered 10,500 cases of water—more than 33,000 gallons—door to door in below-freezing weather. In these low-income neighborhoods, many of the residents didn’t have transportation to go and get the water they so badly needed, so the deliveries were well-received.

After the six weeks were over, large-scale water donations had been arranged, but people were still needed to deliver it. So IRUSA hired 20 contractors through GoodTemps, the staffing arm of Goodwill. These workers are bringing water to about 1,500 families a week—the same families our volunteers delivered to last winter.

Lina Hashem



READ MORE: A father-daughter volunteer team drive 18 hours to deliver water, Page 44.

# EMERGENCIES HERE AT HOME



LOUISIANA

## EMERGENCY TEAM UNDETERRED BY ISLAMOPHOBIA IN LOUISIANA FLOOD RELIEF

**“Destroyed.”**

**That was the rating the IRUSA team gave to his house.**

The man was probably in his late 60s, said IRUSA Disaster Response Manager Hani Hamwi. The Disaster Response Team (DRT) visited him in March during its work to provide relief after the Louisiana floods. When he opened the door, Hamwi was shocked.

“I could smell the stench of wet carpet and mold,” he said. “It was very strong.”

But the man was living there in his destroyed home—and breathing in the mold day and night. He was wheezing. When Hamwi asked him why he didn’t leave, he said, “I don’t have anyone I can stay with.”

Hamwi was in Louisiana in March with a team of 11 volunteers to work alongside the American Red Cross. They worked at a shelter and then assessed damage on thousands of homes. These assessments qualify residents—like the man with the moldy carpet—to receive aid from the Red Cross and cash assistance from IRUSA.

Almost everyone was happy to see

Islamic Relief USA’s team, Hamwi said, but for the first time in the team’s five-year history, their help was rejected in one county.

**“Oh man, it felt like a punch in the gut,” Hamwi said.**

**“That’s really what it felt like. For a few seconds after that, it’s hard to breathe.”**

The American Red Cross responded by pulling out of that county, although they said if individuals reached out for help, the Red Cross would help them.

“They basically said that if you don’t want our partner working there, then you don’t want us working there,” Hamwi said. “The support that we received from our partner was outstanding. ... It’s much easier to deal with a situation like this when you have a strong partner standing with you.”

Hamwi said the flooding in Louisiana was the worst he’s ever seen. More than 5,000 houses were damaged, along with sheds, cars—everything.

“What happens in a flood—even if 2 inches of water got into your house for 12 hours, you need to take out all the cabinets, all the drywall, all the carpet

and insulation,” Hamwi said. “You need to basically take the lower level of the house back to the bare bones and allow the wooden beams to dry. If that does not happen, people will have major issues with mold and bacteria growing in their house, which later could lead to health issues.”

It was already affecting the man with the wet, moldy carpet, Hamwi said. The team assessed his home, qualifying him to receive assistance from IRUSA and the Red Cross.

Volunteer Nour Zein was glad to have a chance to help people like him.

**“What I loved about the opportunity I had deploying with IRUSA was being able to see the impact you are able to make in the community,”** she said. “Since many families had lost everything, organizations coming in to assist the affected community gave them a sense of hope ...

**“But it was also inspirational to witness people from all across the nation, from different faiths and backgrounds, coming together to assist them.**

“You could tell the community was grateful beyond measure.”



TEXAS

## A HELPING HAND FOR RAPHAEL AFTER TEXAS TORNADO FLATTENED HIS HOME



**Darkness had fallen and rain was falling too on Dec. 26 at Raphael’s house in Garland, Texas.**

**Then he received an alert on his cell phone—it wasn’t just a rainstorm, it was a tornado.**

“I was in the kitchen,” he said, gesturing to where the kitchen used to be. Raphael and his wife took their 7-month-old baby son and their 7-year-old daughter, and they all hid in the laundry room.

“You’ve got many things in your head when those things happen,” he said. “To save your life, thinking about your son, about your daughter. It was a minute, the tornado, and one minute—it made all of this.”

The outside walls and roof of Raphael’s home are gone. Some of the internal walls still stand—thankfully, including the laundry room where the family hid. Around the walls is a bare floor where the rest of the house used to be. Islamic Relief USA staff and volunteers helped Raphael haul out the mounds of rubble that used to be all of their cherished things, and sweep the lot clean. He also received cash cards to buy some of the things his family needed most urgently.

“God bless you guys,” he said. “We really thank you—thank you so much for your help. You worked very hard all of this week. It’s a lot of things over here to do, to clean, and it’s a very hard job. So thank you so much ... God bless you.”



SOUTH CAROLINA

## TEAMS ASSIST FLOOD SURVIVORS IN SOUTH CAROLINA AND TEXAS

**In October 2015, it was in South Carolina, and in April 2016, it was in Texas—storms dumped trillions upon trillions of gallons of rain, too much rain, as water rose and surged through neighborhoods and homes.**

Many houses were flooded, and residents had to leave with what they could carry. Some were rescued by boat, some even by helicopter. Roads and bridges were washed away. More than two dozen people were killed in the two floods.

In both emergencies, IRUSA’s Disaster Response Team quickly mobilized to help. The team assessed damage with the American Red Cross, clearing the way for families to qualify for additional assistance. Volunteers staffed shelters, delivered food and other supplies, and comforted survivors.

In Houston, the team ran into someone they recognized from a previous emergency. Her name was Laverne, and IRUSA’s team had helped her when she stayed in an American Red Cross shelter during flooding the year before.

“I asked her what she was doing at the Red Cross, thinking she was affected by the recent storms,” said IRUSA team leader Abdullah Shawky, “but her answer warmed my heart and put a smile on my face.

**“She said that our kindness and the way we treated her when she was at her lowest point inspired her to join the Red Cross to help others—and she is now an employee.”** 🙏

Lina Hashem

## 'AMERICAN DREAM'

ACHIEVED:

FROM ACTIVIST  
TO REFUGEE  
TO HOMEOWNER



Tele (left) and Akote Akwei enjoy the porch of their new house an hour after signing the contract in summer 2015.

In his home country of Togo, Akote Akwei was a top human rights activist. He came to the United States in 2005 to report on conditions there in front of the United Nations. While he was here, he received word that he was a wanted man.

### He couldn't go back.

Akote applied for asylum and received permission to stay with his family in the United States. Now the man known by so many back home was a refugee. He never thought he'd own a house again.

Last summer, thanks in part to Islamic Relief USA donors, that dream came true. And this month—after his family prayed and sang and danced with joy—the Baltimore mayor cut the ribbon on his new home.

"Today is the day I am stepping into the American dream," he said.

Now, he plans to use that home to give back to the community.

### LONG JOURNEY

The family's journey to this day was a decade long—many years of living in small, crowded apartments, constantly careful not to bother anyone with the noise of a lively family.

The beginning of their new life came the day Akote heard about the Pathways to Success program supported by IRUSA. He started his application that same day, and soon was sitting in a classroom, learning about finances and homeownership in America.

In Togo, paying in cash meant "you are somebody," he said. He learned to use credit and pay it back on time, and all of the other steps to own a home.

After they completed their classes and their savings goal, Akote and his wife Tele received matching funds from several groups, including the city of Baltimore, with a 3-to-1 match from IRUSA. Then their home hunt began.

After a long search, their dream became real, and they gathered in front of their home to celebrate with a ceremony last fall.

At the ceremony, Akote—a devout Christian—prayed and thanked God, and his family's joy swelled into song and dance. Then Baltimore's mayor cut the red ribbon on their wooden porch.

Akote was overwhelmed by how many people surrounded his family to celebrate with them. "It's above whatever I could have thought of, and I thank God for that," he said.

### A PLACE FOR GIVING BACK

The house with a large yard on a quiet street is more than the family dreamed of. "Back home in Africa, we love open space," Akote said. Now they can breathe, move and "live like free people," he said.

When Akote and Tele look at the yard, they see future grandchildren playing ... family meals ... joy and laughter.

"This is our village here," Tele said. "Where all my kids and grandkids, our people from my country, we will rejoice. This is our village."

Akote envisions something else—meetings where community members work to help each other achieve their dreams. From this home, he plans to develop a not-for-profit organization to share what he has received with other immigrants like his family.

"This is my family home, and it confirms that the dream is real, and we can have access to it if we believe," he said. "But there is a need for training and coaching and someone talking to my people."

"This house will be the place for talking to them and telling them that we can make it in America." 🙏

Lina Hashem

## SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS

IRUSA Programs Assist Americans Year-Round



Volunteers serve food at a Utah Day of Dignity in August 2015.

### TURKEY DISTRIBUTION

One thousand impoverished families in Washington, D.C., were able to enjoy a full turkey dinner last November, thanks to IRUSA donors and volunteers.

Volunteers and staff teamed up with American Third Pillar Charities for the fifth year to pack up the gifts and hand them out at a Washington, D.C., community center.

The meals included a turkey, stuffing, rice, gravy mix, corn and green beans.

"I'm so thankful that y'all have this program for us," said Felis, picking up her package. "And I'm so thankful to have a turkey for Thanksgiving."

Volunteers pass turkeys along to be given to residents of D.C.'s Ward 8.



### DAY OF DIGNITY

IRUSA volunteers—including refugees—served 9,000 homeless and low-income Americans at 19 Day of Dignity events around the country last year.

"I was so happy when I heard through the grapevine that it was happening again this year," said a guest at Day of Dignity in Portland, Oregon. "I got a rain poncho and a couple pairs of underwear. The bathroom kit should last me a few months too. My dog even got a biscuit!"

Day of Dignity is one of IRUSA's largest annual U.S. programs; 2015 marked its 14th year. The goal is to assist our neighbors in need and to connect them with services that can help all year.

Five hundred people turned out for the Portland event. First, they picked up clothes, blankets, soap and toothbrushes. Then they enjoyed lunch.

### WORKING TOGETHER AT HOME

"It's so nice to sit here and relax a bit while I eat," said one young man, who had been homeless for six months. "Next I'll head over to get my hair cut. It has been a while."

In Seattle, Syrian refugees volunteered at the event, serving U.S. military veterans and dealing a blow to stereotypes and fears.

Volunteer Nabil Al-Salkini, 14, told a reporter he wants people to know "the image of ISIS does not represent us."

And in Houston, Texas, refugees who spoke English helped newer arrivals throughout the day.

"One of the refugees told me how happy they were to be able to give back to their community, and how empowered they felt," IRUSA's Sara Hamid said. "That to me was the essence of Day of Dignity, not only to serve the underprivileged community, but to do it with dignity."

To be part of Day of Dignity 2016, email [usprograms@irusa.org](mailto:usprograms@irusa.org).



D.C. residents pick up fresh produce on the 2016 Day of Service.

### DAY OF SERVICE

On an especially cold and windy Martin Luther King Day in January, more than 100 IRUSA volunteers and staff members spread out through the Washington, D.C., area to serve our communities, hands-on.

Some volunteers repainted a classroom serving low-income children. Some collected food for food banks or assembled 1,200 bag lunches for the homeless. And some even set up fencing around trees in a park.

At America's Islamic Heritage Museum in Washington, D.C., volunteers and staff members served hot meals and handed fresh produce to residents.

"You could see their faces lighting up," said 14-year-old volunteer Farah Turkistani, handing out mangos. "Some people told me they could feed their children now." 🙏

For more on volunteering—and how to join us—see Page 45.

### WHAT YOU DID:

Other U.S. programs in 2015-2016 included:

- Zakat distribution
- Summer food service for low-income children
- Food pantries
- Assistance for refugees
- Financial education programs
- Support for free community health clinics
- Social services for abused women
- Job training and mentoring for recently incarcerated men re-entering the community

# 5 YEARS OF CRISIS 5 YEARS OF CARING

The emergency in Syria reached a tragic anniversary this year—five years of crisis. Half of the country has been displaced from their homes. Four in five Syrians are now living in poverty—half of them in extreme poverty. In 2015, about half a million Syrians tried to make it to Europe, desperate for safety. Thousands died on the way.

For the survivors, it's been five years of living in emergency mode—living on the edge. Millions of lives, once happy and successful, are put on hold while families struggle to survive. Most children are out of school. Children who should be entering kindergarten this year have never breathed a breath in peace.

Throughout this crisis, alhamdulillah, IRUSA donors have sent generous humanitarian aid.

## WHAT YOU DID:

Since 2011, your Syria programs have now reached over 4 million people in the following countries:

- Syria
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Iraq
- Turkey
- Greece
- Germany
- Italy
- Serbia
- United States

## AID HAS INCLUDED:

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Medical care
- Winter necessities
- Household items
- Bathrooms with showers
- Heaters
- Education for refugees
- Psychosocial support
- Clothing

Refugee camp in Greece



## MY PEOPLE OF SYRIA — I'LL KEEP SHARING YOUR STORIES

by Ridwan Adhami

For five years, I have watched my people lose their homes and lives to war. For five years, I have watched as they scattered around the world in search for safety. From country to country, refugee camp to refugee camp, year after year.

For five years, in six different countries and in dozens of camps, I have witnessed first-hand the effects of war and conflict on the people from the same nation my mother, grandmother and her mother were born in—Syria.

I've seen my fellow Syrians in Lebanon, living in makeshift homes—a masjid construction site, a building boiler room and a leather factory near the city garbage dump.

In Jordan I saw them in the Zaatari camp as they tried to survive the dust, dirt and heat of the desert.

I've visited Syrians in Iraqi camps, where some had gone after being displaced twice—first from Syria and then from other places in Iraq as their new host nation became unstable too. Kurdistan



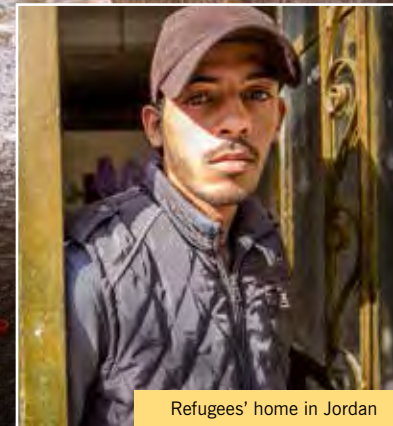
Refugee camp in Iraq



School in Turkey



Refugee camp in Iraq



Refugees' home in Jordan



Refugee camp in Jordan

in the north was now the only safe place they could flee to.

I've watched Syrians, Iraqis, and others risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea on tiny inflatable boats that washed up on the shores of Lesbos, Greece.

I've watched Syrians come off the trains in the rail stations of Germany as they searched for family who had made the journey before them.

I've seen Syrian children trying to catch up on their lost educations in apartment buildings in Turkey.

I've seen my people struggle. I've seen my people survive. I've seen my people in too many different places. I have heard a familiar dialect in corners of the world where the speaker never wanted to be. I've been warmly embraced for speaking Syrian Arabic where it wasn't expected, a comforting and painful reminder of home for both of us.

I wonder how many more years and in how many more places do I need to visit my people. For as long as they are there, I will keep going, and I will keep bringing back their stories to the masses. The most common thing I hear, no matter where I see my people is, "Please let people know what has happened to us," "Please remember us in your prayers," and "Please don't forget us."

*"Please don't forget us."*

**I won't, I can't—your stories and faces are ingrained in my memory forever.**

*So I ask everyone reading this:*

*On behalf of all of my people that I have met in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Greece, Germany and Turkey ...*

*On behalf of the mothers, the fathers, the doctors, the lawyers ...*

*On behalf of the children most of all ...*

*Please do not forget them.*

Don't let our attention fade. Don't turn away as we cross off another year of their suffering.

**They are counting on us.** 🙏

Voice From Syria: Ali's Story

“ They say, ‘Why do Syrians leave their country and migrate?’

But we had no choice *but to leave*.

*In Syria, there was no electricity, no water, no food. We were living a difficult life, worse than you can even imagine.*

*We were on a boat heading toward Europe when, in the middle of the sea, the motor broke down. Water started coming in the boat.*

*My children were in a room with my wife and other women and children. They were screaming and crying and asking God for help. In this situation, only God can help.*

*My wife and children drowned in the sea.*

*I stayed in the water looking for them for two hours.*

*I hoped I would find my wife, one of my children, anybody who was alive.*

*Many of the other people who were on the boat died. They were all floating in the sea and not moving. They died from the cold.*

*After two hours, a fishing boat came and rescued us.*

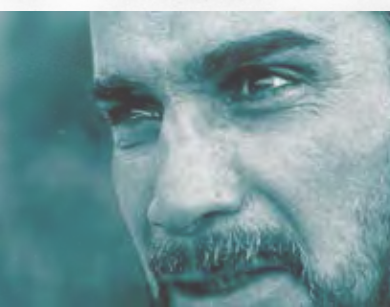
*After 12 days, they found a body washed up on the beach. They asked me if I knew this child. I said, ‘Yes, this is my daughter, Sajida.’*

*After that they showed me four other bodies—more of my children who had died. They gave me the bodies of my children in coffins, and I buried them back home in Syria.*

*They left Syria alive but returned there dead. They had left for Europe so they could live a normal, happy life.*

*Sometimes I find myself talking to my son, Mohammed. I say to him, ‘Come on, Mohammed, let’s go and play,’ and then I realize he is no longer with me. He drowned in the sea.*

*How am I going to keep on living now?*



*To God we belong and to Him we shall return.* This is God’s will.”



# 'A SEA OF PEOPLE'

## ON THE SHORES OF GREECE

IRUSA's Abdullah Shawky traveled to Greece last fall to assist refugees coming on rafts and boats from Turkey. He recalls that the first few days were busy, as he helped arrange services for a few thousand new arrivals each day. He had no idea that he had arrived during a lull.

Then, suddenly, the stormy weather cleared, and with it, a backlog in Turkey also cleared—and 7,000 people arrived in a day. It was like nothing he could have imagined.

"I can't even begin to describe in words what that was like," he said. "It was literally a sea of people that had just come through. Every refugee who came in on a boat came in soaking wet. We ran out of food, we ran out of clothing, we ran out of space and buses. We were just so overwhelmed.

"It was really interesting to see what such a stressful situation does to the psyche."



A refugee on Lesbos waits for a boat to mainland Greece.

Shawky saw some glimpses of the lows that extreme stress and fear can drive people to, like when they rushed forward to safety, forgetting to make way for the young or the weak.

He also saw how strong people can be under some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. He met a family who told him of their shock at seeing the raft they were supposed to ride across the sea. But the smuggler wouldn't let them go back, so they had gathered under his gunpoint to decide where they wanted to die—on Turkey's shore or in the sea.

And he saw some of the best of human nature—like Gabriel, a local man whose tourism business was destroyed by the crisis, yet he went to the shore every day to help them anyway. And like the Greek Coast Guard men, who went out to sea every day to rescue the people flooding their tiny island, and cried over the ones they lost. And the people who came from all around the world to drive vans and make sandwiches.

Shawky cried for those who didn't make it, and for those who did make it but would be sent back home. And he feared for those who made it but faced a freezing winter ahead.

When Shawky returned home, his perspective on life had been changed completely.

"Everything just seems so trivial when you see what the refugees are going through," he said.

"We have so much here that we take for granted that we don't even realize. Even plumbing."

And the extreme blessing of freedom of movement.

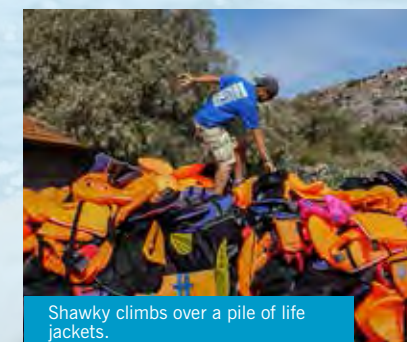
"These refugees paid thousands of dollars and risked their lives to get to Europe," he said. "I literally walked off the plane and into Greece."

And it was just as easy to go home again, back to warmth and safety and ease. 🇺🇸

Lina Hashem



IRUSA's Abdullah Shawky hands a warm meal to new arrivals.



Shawky climbs over a pile of life jackets.

## WHAT YOU DID FOR REFUGEES IN EUROPE

Box: What You Did

Ramadan food packages help low-income and impoverished families during this blessed month each year. In 2015, your

Ramadan food packages helped about a quarter

of a million people in 31 countries.

8,267  
Albania – 2,690

Afghanistan –

Bangladesh – 9,135  
Bosnia &

Herzegovina – 3,360  
Chad – 3,186  
Chechnya – 5,435  
China – 785



Syrians shed tears of joy after setting foot on solid ground.



Afghan refugees receive medical attention in a makeshift clinic.



2-year-old Shaza and her father dry off after the perilous journey.



Muhammad chooses clothing and toys from IR Germany's shop.



A Syrian refugee in Germany receives a hygiene kit.

## 'IT HELPS US FORGET

A LITTLE OF THE BURDEN'

GIFTS HELP DISPLACED FAMILIES  
IN IRAQ THROUGH THE WINTER



An Iraqi woman picks her package of two mattresses, two blankets, rain boots and children's clothes.

**"We planned to stay away for a day or a week or two, and now it's been almost two years."**

When Mohammed's family left their town to get away from the bombs, they expected to return, so they left everything behind. They left their ID cards, passports, the deed to their house, and his medical diplomas. They never got to go back home.

Mohammed is a doctor, and he used to specialize in analyzing lab work. Now he does whatever day labor he can find. Last winter, he stood in line, waiting for gifts sent by IRUSA donors to help his family of six survive the winter.

"It helps," he said. "It is a cold winter, and we need to buy all these things, like clothing and heaters. When you give us these items, it helps lighten the burden on us, and helps us forget a little of the burden of a displaced person."

Another refugee named Uday was in a similar situation. He and his family left a year ago out of fear of ISIS. He left behind his home, his welding shop and his car, and he assumes they are destroyed. He has three young children. His brothers are split up—scattered around the region.

Mohammed said he had signed up with 30 organizations and Islamic Relief was the only one to help.

"I hope you can continue your work and it can reach the people that need it, and that Allah allows you to reach farther with good, everywhere."

Uday put it more simply: "All I have is Allah's mercy." 🙏

### WHAT YOU DID:

IRUSA donors cared for displaced families in Iraq throughout last winter with food and winter supplies.

- Around Baghdad and Erbil, 4,500 families received four months' worth of food, soap, and other hygiene and baby items.
- 1,410 families (approximately 7,050 people) received a winter supply kit containing a heater, mattresses, blankets, pillows and children's clothes and boots.

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR IRAQ & YEMEN



A girl carries a container she filled with clean water from Islamic Relief's water truck in Sana'a, Yemen.

### LIFELINES IN YEMEN

**"It has been almost a year since water was delivered to this neighborhood," said 75-year-old Sho'eya. "Due to the war in Yemen, all basic utilities such as water, electricity, cooking gas, and petrol have all gone unavailable."**

One year after conflict escalated across Yemen, an estimated 21.2 million people—82 percent of the country's population—need humanitarian aid. Major problems include finding food, water and health care.

Sho'eya lives with her son and his family—eight people in a two-room rented house. She wakes up early every day and starts a long journey with an empty water can.

"We cannot buy water," she said. "My only son lost his job like thousands of other Yemenis. We hardly can manage to get other necessities such as food or rent."

IRUSA donors responded by bringing in clean water on trucks. "I am really thankful to have this project in our neighborhood," Sho'eya said. "I don't have to go far away to search for water anymore. Thank you so much for helping us. I am so glad that Islamic Relief can reach such faraway and needy areas."

Donors also are providing hygiene kits, health care, and food—about 230 pounds of food per family for 2,000 families.

The health care was critical for Ahmed's family in Aden.

"We hardly could reach the hospital," he said, "and when we finally did, doctors said they are in serious shortage of the emergency medications needed to heal my wounded son, and many other people."

Ahmed is 70. "It has been days since we came here seeking for treatment," he said from his son's bedside at the hospital, "but doctors always ask me to go and buy essential medical supplies. They always say the hospital's stores are empty. I feel helpless."

Alhamdulillah, Islamic Relief donors sent trauma kits to hospitals, including the one Ahmed's son was at, giving him a better chance to heal.

"I cannot express how happy I am," he said. "The doctors informed me that my son will get the medicine he needs now. Thank you so much, we will never forget your kindness, and will always pray that Allah helps you assist all people in need around Yemen." 🙏

Lina Hashem

### WHAT YOU DID:

In 2015 and 2016, Islamic Relief donors provided relief throughout Yemen, from Sa'adah in the north to Aden in the south.

Families affected by conflict received food in Al Bayda, Amran, Abyan, Al Hudaydah, Marib, Lahj, Taiz, Sana'a, Ibb, Sa'adah, and Dhamar provinces, with several of those communities receiving health care and water too. Another project trucked in water to Aden, Sana'a and Taiz. And Shabwah residents hit by the Chapala storm received food, kitchen sets, tents, mattresses, blankets and clean water.

These projects are helping more than 475,000 people.





# WATER FOR SABA

## DONORS QUENCH THIRST IN PALESTINE

**For Saba and her family in Gaza, getting water has always been hard.**

“All day and night we wouldn’t have water,” she said.

One of her sons would wake up at 1 a.m. to check for it, and then again at 3 a.m.

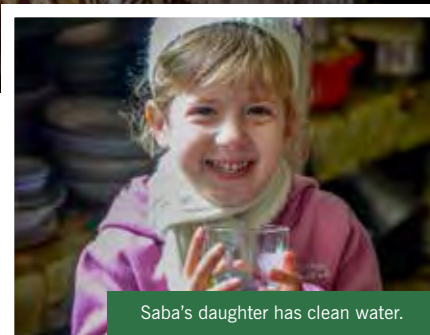
And when the conflict came in the summer of 2014, a bad situation got even worse. Many water sources were damaged or destroyed. According to the United Nations, water supply was disrupted to 2 out of 3 Gaza residents. More than a year later, more than 120,000 people were still waiting to be reconnected.

So IRUSA donors stepped in to help, repairing water systems in Gaza. More than 16,000 meters of water pipes have been laid in Gaza with IRUSA donor support, and now 600 households have direct water connections and 220 households have proper wastewater connections.

Now water flows from Saba’s very own tap, in her very own kitchen, in her very own home.

“Water is the life of everything,” Saba said. “I tell you, we can live without electricity, but we can’t live without water.”

“I want to thank [you] for bringing water to our homes.” 🙏



Saba's daughter has clean water.

### WHAT YOU DID:

In 2015, IRUSA donors gave more than \$6.8 million in humanitarian aid to Palestinians, helping more than a quarter of a million people. You sent food, water, health care, psychosocial support, shelter, access to education, and orphan support.

#### Here's what you're doing right now:

- Installing new water systems to replace old or damaged ones
- Rebuilding and equipping schools
- Teaching job skills to young adults
- Supporting orphans with necessities and psychological care, and teaching job skills to their guardians

### DROUGHT WREAKS HAVOC IN EAST AFRICA

**The people of many eastern African countries are used to dealing with hot, dry weather. Masha'Allah, they are so strong in difficult conditions.**

But sometimes weather comes along that is just too much. Now is one of those times. Parts of Africa are facing their worst drought in decades—some say 50 years.

The weather condition called El Niño has caused an imbalance in the rains—some areas are getting too little rain, while others are getting too much. In the places with too little water, seasonal rains were delayed, or they failed altogether, leading to drought. Some areas of eastern Africa have already seen two consecutive poor harvests, and the weather is getting worse.

The result is that there's not enough food, and what's left is very expensive. Millions of people are malnourished, and livestock are dying. Families are selling the animals they have left to buy food—but when that money runs out, there's nothing left to fall back on. Right now, Ethiopia is the hardest hit. Parts of Somalia are facing serious problems too.

Many people who are struggling right now just got through a serious drought or even famine only a few years ago. Local teams have told us how serious the situation is again this year. They're delivering emergency relief in their communities, and they've asked IRUSA for help. For updates on this work, visit [irusa.org](http://irusa.org). 🙏



Ethiopia is the hardest hit.

### IRUSA DONORS' GIFT HELPED END EBOLA OUTBREAK

**When the rare disease ebola exploded in 2014, it took the world by surprise. The outbreak that gripped the world in fear has now subsided, alhamdulillah, and IRUSA donors helped by sending infrared thermometers.**

Thermometers are important for diagnosis, but since they touch the patient, they also pose the risk of spreading the disease to health-care workers or to the next patient.

So Islamic Relief USA donors sent 2,050 infrared thermometers to Guinea, where the outbreak started. Infrared thermometers don't touch the patient.

This gift helped doctors and nurses do their work more safely and treat more people while reducing the risk of transmitting the disease to other patients.

In December 2015, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak over in Guinea. IRUSA thanks our donors for playing a part in that success! 🙏



# SCALING MOUNTAINS TO REACH EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS



Islamic Relief staff deliver U.S. donors' gifts to residents of remote mountain villages after the 2015 earthquake.

## WORKERS HAND-DELIVER YOUR GIFTS TO REMOTE VILLAGES IN PAKISTAN

Last fall—almost exactly the 10-year anniversary of the devastating 2005 earthquake—a 7.5-magnitude quake shook Pakistan. Hundreds of people died, thousands were injured and more than 100,000 homes were damaged. IRUSA donors quickly sent tents and winter necessities.

Here are excerpts from IRUSA CEO Anwar Khan's reports from the field:



CEO Anwar Khan helps a young resident with his care package.

November 5—

*It's 2 a.m. when I arrive. We took a 7-hour ride to Shangla, which is 90 miles away as the bird flies, but by road, it's more than 230 miles: First by highway, then side roads, then along mountain trails.*

*Shangla is scenic, with houses spotting the hills. As you get closer, however, you realize that many of these homes have fallen.*

*It's ironic to me that in Los Angeles, people with a lot of money live on hills, but here, the poorest people live on them. These homes are built with stone, wood and mud, and they collapse easily. Three hundred homes were destroyed in just this village. I was amazed by the grace of people waiting patiently in line for aid. They insisted we stay and eat with them.*

November 7—

*When we arrived in Baasi village council, we were met by volunteers and a long line of people waiting for help. Each family received blankets, sleeping mats, pillows and other necessities given by IRUSA donors.*

*Most of the people in line were men, except 10-year-old Azmat. Her father died 5 years ago. Her supplies were in bags bigger than she was, so we helped her carry them. Her family was already struggling before the earthquake. Now, their house is destroyed. Every tent or blanket makes a difference when you have so little.*

## IRUSA DONORS IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR PAKISTAN'S WOMEN

**Pakistan's Kalash community lives in isolated mountain communities in the north, near the border with Afghanistan.**

They are a distinct ethnic and religious group who have maintained their own culture and traditions. Their communities are among the most inaccessible and marginalized in Pakistan. And living with few amenities high up in the mountains, they are especially vulnerable to natural disasters.

The 2015 floods and earthquake left Kalash women of Chitral district

in ignominy. According to Kalashi customs, women are segregated during menstruation and cannot use the bathrooms in their homes at this time. The outdoor facilities where they go are called bashalins. Many of the bashalins were swept away or destroyed in the 2015 disasters. Women still had to leave their homes, but now they were exposed to new threats and their dignity was compromised.

Local Islamic Relief staff proposed a plan to help, and donors in the United States responded to the request

and helped build new facilities for the women. The new balashinis are benefiting more than 500 women—restoring their safety, privacy and dignity.

Community member Laila Gul thanked Islamic Relief for the facilities.

"I feel like my dignity is not compromised," she said. "Like other women of my village we have new bashalins." 🙏

Muhammad Haseeb Khalid



# ROHINGYA

WALKING A FINE LINE TO HELP  
A COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO EXIST



The imam leads Friday prayer at the mosque in the camp.



**Imagine being told that your name was illegal, and that nobody was allowed to say it, because saying the word was admitting that you existed.**

Imagine having all your friends, family and neighbors removed from their homes and put into cramped camps for their “safety,” while their homes were burned so nobody could return to them. All those who resisted were attacked and even killed.

That is exactly what happened to the Rohingya four years ago in Myanmar.

The Rohingya, an unrecognized minority Muslim ethnic group, have been living in those same camps ever since. They aren’t allowed to leave the camps, they aren’t allowed to work, they

aren’t allowed to send their children to schools, and they aren’t allowed to get medical attention at the local hospitals. So they have simply survived in these camps for the past four years, holding onto what little they have left.

Islamic Relief USA donors have helped the Rohingya survive by providing health care—a basic medical clinic in the camp, and a speed boat to take more serious cases to the nearest hospital they are allowed to use, two hours away. This project provides some of the very few jobs available to the camp residents—orderlies and support staff at the clinic.

IRUSA staff and local partners want to do more, but it’s not currently allowed.

“We know the work we are doing here isn’t enough but it is all we can do for them,” said a local partner who is

helping run this project for IRUSA. His name and his organization’s name are withheld for their safety and for the safety of the camp residents.

“Without this, they have nothing, they have no help,” he says, “so we have to keep providing whatever we can just so that somebody knows the Rohingya still exist.”

On a recent field visit to the Rohingya camps, IRUSA staff were able to witness the degenerating condition of the camps first hand. Open sewage runs beside the small structures as children play and run in between the wooden planks that hold up the walls from collapsing. Six to eight family members crowd each living space that triples as a living room, kitchen and bedroom.

During our visit, we were not allowed to say the name “Rohingya.”

Even with these harsh conditions and no end in sight, the Rohingya people hold strong to their faith and sense of community.

“They all pool what little money they have so that I can continue to be the imam and run this masjid inside the camp,” the Imam tells us as we sit inside a hollowed-out space that has been converted into a masjid. Congregation members show us the space where they pray Friday prayers together, pointing out fire scorch marks on the walls and the shattered glass.

It is broken, but the masjid still stands, still survives, much like the people praying inside. 🕌

*Ridwan Adhami*



Thanda holds her book of names.

## SHE’S SAYING THEIR NAMES

**Thanda’s\* family has lived in Myanmar for generations. Her father was a highly respected police chief in the community. They’re Muslims—Rohingya—and they lived and worked side by side with the Buddhist Rakhine for as long as she can remember.**

But on Oct. 22, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. that all changed. The Rohingya were violently attacked, their homes and villages burned and they were forced to move into camps.

Thanda and her husband became leaders in the same camps Islamic Relief is working in because of her previous respected status in the community. They were now the only voice the Rohingya had to speak out and demand rights for themselves.

But 6 months ago when her daughter Hayma\* got a serious

stomach illness, medical treatment at the mobile clinic wasn’t enough to keep her alive. So the mother and daughter escaped to the city of Yangon to get the life-saving treatment Hayma needed.

Now free from the camps, Thanda is using her status to speak out on behalf of her people.

She holds up a treasured notebook, saying, “This is a book of all those who have passed away, or whose bodies haven’t been found at all, and those who haven’t been given proper burial.”

The handwritten book is full of names—pages upon pages of names of those lost. It’s a living document that is evidence of what has happened to her community. “These are just the ones we know about,” she says.

“Thank you for all the help you have given to keep my people alive, but we must do more and tell more people about what has happened here.” 🕌

*Ridwan Adhami*

*\*Names changed for safety.*

# RAMADAN THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

To understand the spirit of giving, we remember and reflect on the spirits of those who gave. Our history is replete with stories that inspire us not only to give more, but to give better. These are people who understood the greater goal of business, not simply to create money for a few, but to better society for all. The power of this mindset—one focused on giving and investing, rather than hoarding and amassing—is a great enough vehicle to transform entire societies. Three personalities from Islamic history embody this true spirit of giving in Islam.

First, there is Uthman: skillful trader, wealthy community member. Uthman used his wealth to provide relief during an economic drought in Madinah. The city was struggling, and Uthman noticed that scarce resources like water were in the hands of a few men. To confront this economic disparity, he negotiated a settlement with a well owner in Madinah, in which he would alternate days of usage with the owner. During his days of ownership, he did not charge the community to use the water, until eventually no one went to the well on the owner's day. The man sold his share to Uthman, and Uthman assigned it as an endowment in Allah's name for all Muslims to drink from. Later on, he received an offer for the well for double its price. Uthman continued to refuse until the person offered to pay nine times its original price and asked, "Who will offer you more?" Uthman responded, "Allah. He gave me 10 times the one good deed."

Then there is Mansa Musa: wealthy West African king, devout Muslim. In the early

1300s, he left his kingdom of Mali and began a pilgrimage to Mecca. He is known to be one of the richest men to have ever lived, but he is best known for his Hajj. He carried 180,000 kg of gold with him, and if that is not difficult enough to imagine, consider this: he gave it all away. He was said to have taken more than 500 people with him on that Hajj, each carrying a staff of solid gold. When passing through Cairo, he gave away so much gold that the price of gold itself fell, and the economy was affected worldwide. Talk about controlling the money markets—his giving literally changed the economy of the world.

And finally, there is the story of Fatima: champion of knowledge. In the 800s in Fez, Morocco, a pious man named Muhammad ibn Abdullah Al Fihri lived with his wife and two daughters. He was known to be a successful businessman, and he ensured that his daughters received a broad religious and secular education. When he passed away, his daughter Fatima dedicated her life to using her inherited wealth for a greater good. Realizing how crowded the masajid were in Fez, Fatima spearheaded a campaign to fund and oversee the construction of the Al-Qarawaiyyin Masjid. She fasted every day for two years during construction until the masjid opened in Ramadan, and she was the first to offer two rak'ahs of thanks when it did. This was not an ordinary masjid, it was an institution of learning that granted degrees and hosted courses in subjects ranging from fiqh to medicine. It is the oldest continuous degree-granting institution in the world, thriving to this day. The great historian Ibn Khaldun was a student there, and he described Fatima as a spark that started a fire of learning.

Knowing our traditions and sharing these stories can be transformative in our personal and community lives. When we frame history as our collective story, we understand that we

are at the cusp of continuing a legacy. Faced with challenges that feel limiting, as a community we sometimes feel vulnerable and susceptible to an overwhelming tide that can swallow us up if we let it. And yet when we zoom out, it is clear to see the tremendous blessings all around us. There are things to rejoice over; there is hope for the taking. We are fortunate to be a highly educated community, replete with doctors, artists, engineers, thought leaders, lawyers, business owners, and a wide array of other professionals who have invested in their own education and the education of their children. We are bursting at the seams with resources within an incredibly wealthy community. And while we live in a time and place of abundance, the world around us is spread thin with a scarcity that calls us to account for the undeniable imbalance of resources. As Muslims, to enjoy a win for the "haves" is to accept a defeat for the "have nots." And perhaps instead of talking about the spirit of giving, we should acknowledge more simply that the spirit of Islam is to give. A body without a spirit is dead, and ignoring this essence of our faith will undoubtedly result in a spiritual death for our vibrant community.

Uthman, Musa, Fatima. Remember their names, but most importantly, honor them by carrying their torch. Remembrance without action is a hollow body: beautiful but lifeless, tragic in its futility. We have potential waiting to be realized. We have institutions of learning and prayer waiting to be built. Not only the structures, but the people who will become custodians of this message moving forward. How can you be the next Uthman, the next Mansa Musa, the next Fatima Al Fihri? The first step is a new mantra: We give not to give, but to build. For ourselves, our children, and for generations to come. To restore balance, and to work together for a better world.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said; "In the life of this world, everyone is a guest and his wealth is a loan. The guest will part and the loan will be returned." The only true way to own wealth in this realm is to have it testify for you beyond the grave. Take ownership of your wealth and let the spirit of giving thrive through your generosity, lest it grows weary of our inattention and seeks out more able vessels. Feel it nipping at the back of your heels, like an anxious wind colliding with your stillness, reminding you to move. 🙏

Shad Imam





Nevada

## RAMADAN FOOD PACKS REACH U.S. FAMILIES

Islamic Relief USA has long distributed food for Ramadan around the world. Last year, for the first time, the program brought food to Americans in need.

Volunteers packaged 3,000 boxes full of food in the two weekends before Ramadan, and the first boxes were handed out on the first day of Ramadan in Virginia.

“It felt very good to give the boxes to people, seeing the smile on their faces and hearing them say thank you in many languages,” said Naeem Muhammad, U.S. Programs Manager. “We had people from many backgrounds and faiths.”

Hunger is often seen as a problem overseas, but 47 million Americans have trouble affording food. Many of the people in this situation are working—sometimes more than one job—but there’s not enough money left for food after other bills are paid. So our partner organizations across the country distribute food provided by IRUSA donors.



Maryland



Virginia



Joanne in Utah

Joanne, 68, picked up one of these food packages with her granddaughter on the Native American reservation in Utah, where they live. Joanne’s family of four lives far from the city with no grocery stores nearby, and very little income. “Every little thing will help a lot,” she said. 🙏

Lina Hashem



Amran in Somaliland

### ‘WE CAN ACTUALLY HAVE MEALS’

In Somaliland, Amran sits in a wheelchair to the side of the distribution site, where families are waiting to get their Ramadan food packages.

Amran’s husband is a laborer, but there’s not enough work. Their home is made of metal sheets and they have no electricity or running water. They have a difficult time affording food.

The Ramadan food package means a lot to Amran and her husband. “We can actually have meals! We can have suhoor, and make sambusa for iftar,” she said.

She said she knows Islamic Relief very well in Somaliland. “You’re one of the only ones that help us,” she said.

And she has a message to her donors:

“We pray for you,” she said. “Thanks be to Allah, alhamdulillah, and thanks to the people who remember us during Ramadan and give us food. Please, help more families that are low-income in Ramadan.”

### WHAT YOU DID:

Ramadan food packages help low-income and impoverished families during this blessed month each year. In 2015, your Ramadan food packages helped about a quarter of a million people in 31 countries.

Afghanistan	8,267
Albania	2,690
Bangladesh	9,135
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,360
Chad	3,186
Chechnya	5,435
China	785
Ethiopia	9,925
India	12,015
Indonesia	1,690
Iraq	22,835
Jordan	2,380
Kenya	7,212
Kosovo	3,654
Lebanon	3,570
Malawi	3,800
Mali	3,170
Myanmar	14,612
Niger	2,366
Pakistan	21,078
Palestine	54,035
Somalia	3,384
South Africa	988
South Sudan	2,028
Sri Lanka	3,260
Sudan	1,830
Syria	21,540
Tunisia	1,710
United States	15,000
Yemen	4,207
Zimbabwe	444

**TOTAL: 249,591\***

\*These numbers are estimates based on number of packages distributed and average number of family members in each country.

**QURBANI  
AROUND THE WORLD**

Every year for Eid al-Adha, IRUSA donors share meat with people living in poverty in about 30 countries around the world.

Instead of telling you what this gift means to many of the families who receive it, we'll let a few of them tell you themselves ...



Lebanon

**UNITED STATES**

It was the first distribution of the year last fall, and people lined up at a Virginia mosque, speaking Arabic, Farsi and Spanish.

Mosque staff member Zahraa Abdallah said, "Today is very happy!"

The mosque's neighbors were looking forward to this day, Abdallah said. The mosque operates a food pantry that is frequented by low-income neighbors of all faiths and backgrounds. But they only get beef on Eid al-Adha, when IRUSA donors give it to them.

"90% of the clients are Hispanic," Abdallah said. "They said, 'Are you going to distribute the meat just for Muslims?' We said, 'No, it's for everybody.'"

An IRUSA staff member said:

"What you give reaches out to all people. Today I saw young people, I saw women, I saw Muslims and non-Muslims, from different backgrounds, and especially the elderly.

"What you give is more than what you think. You were able to make a lot of people happy today."



Indonesia

**INDONESIA**

When Qurbani meat is distributed, staff survey the recipients to ensure the program's quality. Here are some excerpts from 2015 survey results from Indonesia:

- Myaneh, 60, head of household with 6 children and 6 grandchildren: "No fridge, has stove. Only eats meat at Qurbani time."
- Haji Mukit, 95 years old: "No fridge, no stove—wood fire only. Last ate meat during last Qurbani."
- Masni, 60, family of 4: "She doesn't know how long it will last because she rarely ever cooks meat."
- Cipi Maria, 55, widow with 7 children at home: "No fridge, no stove—will cook over wood fire." Question: "Are you satisfied with the type and quality of the parcel? Why or why not?" Answer: "Yes—because she gets meat!"



Syria

**SYRIA**

Batoul\*\* and her family are from Syria. They had to leave their home in search of safety, finding shelter in a camp for displaced people.

Living the life of refugees, they ate whatever food they could find, and it almost never included meat. Their son stopped thriving and became weak, and there was nothing Batoul could do about it.

Last Eid al-Adha, a special gift arrived in their camp—meat from IRUSA donors. "Everyone was really excited, all the mothers and children, including myself," she said. "You didn't forget about us."

"My son was telling me 'Mom, I want meat,' and this time I was actually able to get it for him. Tomorrow insha'Allah I'll cook it and we'll enjoy having something wholesome to eat."

\*\*Names changed for safety.



Malaysia



Indonesia



Chechnya

**WHAT YOU DID:**

IRUSA donors shared meat with more than three-quarters of a million people in 32 countries in 2015, including 70,000 people in the United States. Here are totals\* for IRUSA donors' Eid al-Adha gifts by country in 2015.

Afghanistan	14,390
Albania	1,530
Bangladesh	38,775
Bosnia	9,300
Chad	42,735
Chechnya	12,025
China	1,405
Ethiopia	12,410
Germany	8,500
India	107,850
Indonesia	4,250
Iraq	7,945
Jordan	3,490
Kenya	8,300
Kosovo	5,190
Lebanon	4,190
Malawi	14,275
Mali	22,750
Myanmar	17,165
Niger	40,300
Pakistan	48,700
Palestine	39,272
Somalia	19,975
South Africa	3,230
South Sudan	3,305
Sri Lanka	72,575
Sudan	14,460
Syria	121,975
Tunisia	350
United States	70,000
Yemen	6,425
Zimbabwe	13,665

**TOTAL: 790,707**

\*These numbers are estimates based on number of packages distributed and average family size in each country.

## RESTORING LIFE TO POLLUTED SLUM

Some of the world's most crowded slums can be found in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. Its more than 15 million residents share just 134 square miles, and most of them pack their entire existence into a space the size of a closet.

Dhaka has seen a mass influx to the city from rural areas that offer diminishing prospects for livelihood due to climate change and natural disasters. Its population has more than doubled in the last decade, and the infrastructure has not kept pace. Half of the urban population in Bangladesh live in neighborhoods like this.

Among the most serious problems in the slums is sanitation. So IRUSA donors have been bringing fresh water and sanitation to families in some of these neighborhoods, installing pumps to drain stagnant rainwater, constructing latrines to control sewage, and other watershed management support.

Shamsu Nahar lives with her six children on a crowded street at the bottom of a valley. When it would rain, garbage would collect in the valley, and the water would rise so high that it would reach up to her chest, bringing with it human waste, snakes, insects and disease. The community pond was packed with trash, and the children used it as a playing field.

Shamsu had been living in these conditions for 30 years when Islamic Relief arrived with help. The relief was immediate and even the pond began to return to health, announcing its gratitude with signs of vegetation. The new green around her offered the promise of a new sustainable source of livelihood—and hope—for this disenfranchised community.

## NEW SLAUGHTERHOUSE DESIGN TURNS POLLUTION INTO FUEL

**An innovative new IRUSA-funded program is turning a source of pollution into a blessing.**

For decades, the cleanup of slaughterhouses in Dhaka was unregulated, and the responsibility for cleaning up the waste fell to neighboring homes. Khairunnisa, an 85-year-old woman, had shouldered this burden since 1971, unpaid and subject to dangerously unsanitary conditions. She used to have to sell the animals' intestines to make ends meet, and she frequently became ill.

Islamic Relief pioneered a model to redesign the facilities for optimal sanitation.

A machine was installed that converts animal waste and organs into biofuel, which is then funneled through lines to the surrounding homes for free cooking fuel. Islamic Relief also facilitated an agreement that requires butchers to pay a fee to use the slaughterhouses—so now they can pay custodians to clean them.

This initiative was the first program of its kind in Bangladesh and changed the lives of many who were suffering like Khairunnisa.



This clean, redesigned slaughterhouse (above) provides fuel for cooking (below).



## IRUSA DONORS AID A STRANDED COMMUNITY

Bangladesh's Urdu-speaking minority community, sometimes called Biharis, are known as a stranded community. They are a group of Muslims who migrated from India to east Pakistan in the 1940s and were left stateless in 1971 when east Pakistan became independent and was renamed Bangladesh. They were denied both Pakistan and Bangladesh nationalities, and have been consigned to live in 66 camps across the country.

The dwellings were supposed to be temporary, but for an estimated 300,000 stranded persons, they have been home for over four decades.

In these camps, houses are tiny, usually less than 8 by 8 feet for entire families. Fraying electrical lines provide little power, and rotting foundations can be seen through holes in the walls. The kitchen stove is an open flame. People, goats, and chickens share walkways between houses, and when it rains, the entire camp floods.

"During rainy season, sewage collects and floods so high that it reaches my knees," one resident told an IRUSA staff member.

Islamic Relief set out in 2014 to assist Bihari households in five camps in Dhaka, and the first phase is wrapping up. IRUSA donors have provided new wells and bathrooms, and formed committees so residents can maintain their new resources. Many impoverished families have had their homes renovated, and the repairs have drastically changed their lives for the better.

### LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT OFFERS HOPE

The humanitarian needs of these communities go beyond immediate requirements such as water and

shelter. Simply repairing the camps is not enough. Innovation is at the heart of IRUSA's project, which is helping families build a secure livelihood so they can become self-sufficient—the way they want to live.

This program focuses on women, especially widows, and helps them start businesses. Each woman chooses a skill or interest, like sewing or poultry farming. Then she receives training and a grant to buy the assets she needs. The new business owners join together to form organizations where they learn about group finance and



IRUSA's Bilal Aslam (right) meets one of the new groups.

share a joint bank account from which they can take small loans for their businesses. The groups choose their leaders, empowering them to nurture a community of learning and support.

"These women are looking for a way out," said Bilal Aslam, IRUSA international program coordinator, after visiting the camps. "They were beyond grateful."

The aim is that, over time, this innovative approach built on sustainability, rather than long-term dependency, will offer the way out they have been looking for. 🙌

*Chancey Gannett*

## INNOVATION AT THE HEART OF RELIEF IN BANGLADESH



Women in the sustainable livelihood project hold their account books.



This pond, once filled with garbage, is now covered with green plants—signs of life.



A girl uses the new water pump installed in her village.

Naseema's cows have helped ease her family's poverty and pay for her children's education.

# EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES IN PAKISTAN

## LIVESTOCK PROGRAM HELPS LIFT FAMILIES OUT OF POVERTY

**Naseema Akhtar, 45, lives in a village in Neelum, in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, with her husband and their four children. Her husband's income isn't enough for the family's needs, even in normal times.**

**In emergencies, Naseema's family had nothing to fall back on.**

Kashmir has been called a paradise on earth by those who are mesmerized by the beauty of its endless string of hills, raging rivers and pure nature. But it's a harsh environment for earning a living. Natural disasters are frequent,

including landslides, earthquakes and extreme weather conditions, and conflict is a constant threat.

In December 2012, Islamic Relief Pakistan launched a comprehensive project to improve the well-being of marginalized communities in the remote and sometimes inaccessible areas of district Bagh and District Neelum.

Local Islamic Relief staff identified Naseema's family to participate in a livelihood project, and helped them buy a cow—the family paid half and Islamic Relief USA donors paid the other half. Naseema also took part in livestock training.

Naseema now has milk for her family's nutrition, and extra to sell at the market. She has also raised the calves, expanding her small herd to three. Her

milk sales bring in about \$285 per month—a huge boost for her family's income.

"Before Islamic Relief's support, the financial woes of my family were immense," she said. "Now my sons go to a better school and we have lifted ourselves out of poverty. I will continue expanding my business. I am thankful to Islamic Relief." 🙏



## STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AGAINST DISASTERS

Pakistan-administered Kashmir is prone to disasters, from floods to earthquakes to landslides. So IRUSA donors are helping local communities prepare for emergencies to reduce the damage.

Local residents joined together in committees to identify common threats and plan for emergencies. Emergency response teams are training in skills including first aid, search and rescue, and firefighting.

Ayaz, 23, reached out to Islamic Relief to take part in this project, and his training soon paid off.

One day, in a Dhirkot city hotel, a gas cylinder exploded. The wooden building was quickly engulfed in flames, and 150 nearby shops were at risk. Ayaz heard about the fire and raced to the site to use his new firefighting skills,

securing the town. The entire town appreciated what he did.

He said, "I am thankful to Islamic Relief for providing me such a fruitful training and building my capacities on disaster management." 🙏

*Muhammad Haseeb Khalid*



Ayaz is helping protect his city.

### WHAT YOU DID:

**After the earthquake, you sent hundreds of tents and many more kits of winter necessities, in a project estimated to help more than 10,000 people.**

**Here are some other projects you recently completed in Pakistan:**

- Supported district health systems by equipping and furnishing health-care centers, providing essential medicines and outpatient services. Services ranged from treatment of infections to prenatal care to psychosocial support. Female doctors were hired so conservative women would accept treatment. Hospital staff were trained in psychosocial support, and communities were educated on hygiene for improved health. This project helped more than 74,000 people.
- Helped families build successful agricultural businesses through training, equipment and establishment of irrigation systems, farms, orchards, shops, veterinary

practices and community organizations; this helped more than 34,000 people.

- Eye care and surgeries to restore sight, helping more than 24,000 people.
- You're also currently strengthening communities in Pakistan-administered Kashmir against disaster by helping them assess risks and plan for emergencies.



## ISLAMIC RELIEF COMBATS LITERACY CHALLENGES FOR AFGHAN WOMEN

Six hours outside of Bamyān, Islamic Relief USA staff travel off-road to the Waras district in rural Afghanistan, the home of a highly successful IR program dedicated to women's literacy. As they wind through dangerous routes carved out of mountainsides, one thing is clear before even reaching their destination: life here is hard.

Only 18% of women in Afghanistan can read and write. Many do not attend school for cultural or safety reasons, so this program focuses on accessibility by bringing the lessons right to their door with home-based instruction.

It has been so successful that its fourth class of 900 students are wrapping up their lessons. The women learn to read and write and receive business training to help them become self-sufficient.

Hajar, a graduate of the program, told Islamic Relief that she used to be frustrated because she could not even read the signs at the market. She said now she can read everything from signs to phone numbers to her children's vaccination cards. And now she is adding to her family's income through her poultry and tailoring businesses.

She said she feels stronger than ever before—and this program has changed her life. 🙏



Literacy brings power for Afghan women.



Wudenish sells spices to take care of her children.

## WIDOWS IN ETHIOPIA TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR FUTURES

**Wudenish tried to sell spices after her husband died, but she couldn't get her business started. She was struggling to support her three children.**

It's started now, after Islamic Relief USA donors gave her training, supplies and about \$237 to pay for initial costs. Her spices are selling well, and she's earning money regularly—and saving some each month.

She is one of 250 widows who were helped through a livelihood assistance program based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The women established savings groups and received savings awareness and bookkeeping training.

"From the training, I benefitted a lot," she said. "I am leading an organized business."

She's planning to expand it now.

"I am very happy because I can manage my business and my children's expenses," she said. "I manage my family by myself. This is an amazing feeling I'll never let go of."

### WHAT YOU DID:

This women's business program in Ethiopia is part of a livelihood and childhood project that is also providing job training and other services for youth. This project has also equipped five youth centers with items including books and computers, and vocational training courses have begun for young adults, especially orphans. The goal of this program is to help disadvantaged families establish a secure livelihood.



Habtmu shows his new woodworking skills.



## SEEDS OF HOPE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Women in soil-rich South Sudan are taking charge of their livelihood, and Islamic Relief USA donors are giving them the tools they need.

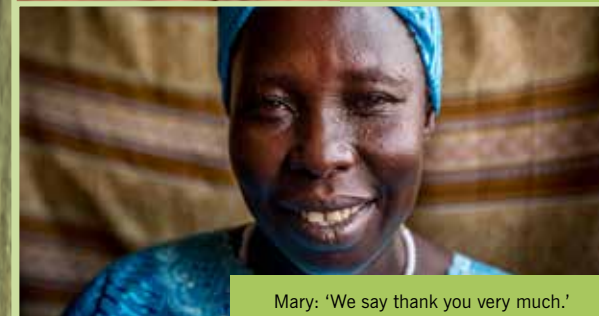
Rural Tarkeka, a village caught in the crossfires of conflict and facing a scarcity of resources, is carried on the shoulders of its women. They head their households and cultivate the land while the men of the village seek out work in the city. This year, IRUSA provided seeds and farming equipment to hundreds of households.

Mary, the South Sudan representative in Tarkeka, remarked that Islamic Relief was one of the only organizations helping: "We say thank you very much because you came down to the grassroots to see us and you are empowering women here."

Joyce, the leader of the women's association, added: "We appreciate Islamic Relief's support, and you see we're using it meaningfully. This assistance will never go to waste. We're going to keep working for our village and we're going to keep working for a better future. We wish you'll keep working for our women."

They plant more than sorghum and maize in Tarkeka; they plant seeds of opportunity providing hope for a better future. 🌱

*Chancey Gannett*



Mary: 'We say thank you very much.'



The women's organization in Tarkeka.

## ORPHAN TEACHES STAFF HUMBLING LESSON

**Shimu lost her father when she was only 1 year old. She lives in a rural village in Rangpur, Bangladesh, with her grandmother and older siblings.**

We went to her house to talk to her family about her situation and whether the sponsorship is helping her.

The second we arrived, we heard laughter from inside and this little ball of energy comes running out, dirty face and all, with her grandmother chasing her, trying to wipe her mouth clean. After some resistance, she is wiped clean and ready to meet us.

She can't stop laughing and begins calling me "dada," which I'm told means brother in Bangla. I am honored to be welcomed into the family so quickly. Trying to get her attention for a photo, I stick out my hand, which she quickly grabs with both of hers.

My colleague asks some more questions as we piece together her story and situation. She has a cleft lip, and she doesn't say many words for a 4-year-old. The local office manager says she might have some slight autism. While it might have slowed her learning, it didn't slow down her personality. She was full of life.

She signaled to the ground, patting on the floor, telling me to sit with her, so I did. Then she pointed to the camera as I sat beside her. I never like taking "selfies" with the people and children I meet, but she basically demanded that I take one. I obliged as she laughed harder and harder with each camera click. I would show her the images and she would signal more, more. So I made silly faces to make her laugh, not caring who was watching or what anybody thought. It was her moment. It was about her happiness.

Shimu reminded me how blessed I am to be able to do this work and bring her story to others.

She reminded me why it is our human duty to take care of one another, especially the orphans.

She reminded me that it is so much simpler than we make everything out to be.

She reminded me how fortunate we all are.

She reminded me to smile and laugh in the face of everything. 🙌

Ridwan Adhami

## MARIA'S STORY 'I CAN TEACH OTHER STUDENTS AND BE A LIGHT OF HOPE'

**Orphan sponsorship means so much. It means even more than food on the table or clothes to stay warm. For so many children, it means a chance for a better future.**

In many countries, school isn't free, and orphans have to drop out when their guardian can't afford to pay. For Maria in Pakistan, orphan sponsorship meant that after her father died, her mother could keep paying her school expenses. Maria is 20 now, and she's ready to give back.

**Here's her message:**

*"I want to thank my donor. Because of them, I was able to get an education.*

*If I didn't get the sponsorship, I wouldn't have been able to continue my education.*

*I'm doing my bachelor's in education psychology. And insha'Allah, I would like to get my master's in education, so I can teach other students and benefit them, and be a light of hope for them."*

Maria is in college now.

# LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTY

Shimu grabs IRUSA Creative Director Ridwan Adhami's hand as he takes her photo.



Srimuta's expanded livestock venture is helping her care for three orphans.

### Alternative Orphan Sponsorship Program

Islamic Relief USA donors are making the future brighter for more than 900 orphans in Bangladesh with a new program offering a path after sponsorship ends.

As sponsored orphans approach their 18th birthday, many are grateful for a childhood eased of suffering, but they're unsure how to build a life as adults. Now, IRUSA donors are helping orphans' families build a sustainable living they can rely on for years to come. This includes education and family business opportunities.

Srimuta takes care of three orphans along with her own three children, and this program is helping her fund their education. Before, she could not afford their school fees, and now she even has leftover resources to support her livestock and poultry farming venture and care for their other needs.

She only wishes more families could share in her newfound empowerment. "If other communities have needs like ours, they should be helped," she said.

Awareness of hunger can translate to food for children like Dawud in Jordan.

# SPEAKING OUT ON HUNGER

IRUSA Urges World Leaders to Act

**Islamic Relief provides humanitarian aid, but we also do something else—we speak out for those whose voices aren't heard.**

Advocacy is the job of IRUSA's public affairs department, and in 2015, the team focused on speaking up for the hungry.

Hunger affects 795 million people worldwide—1 in every 9 people. As a supporter of the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals that were ratified in 2015, IRUSA is committed to ending hunger worldwide by 2030. We believe it's possible.

In the United States, 47 million Americans don't have the food they need. Most of them are elderly, children, or disabled. Many are veterans.

In 2015, IRUSA's Public Affairs department met with members of

Congress and government officials to advocate for laws and programs that would improve food security and reduce hunger in America. We collaborated with coalitions such as the Alliance to End Hunger and the Interfaith Working Group on Domestic Human Needs to raise our voices together.

Alhamdulillah, our voices were heard.

Our coalitions' advocacy provided a strong push that influenced Congress to pass a new agriculture bill protecting programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps—a program that helps keep food on the table for millions faced with poverty.

In 2016, Islamic Relief USA invites you to join us in speaking up for the hungry. We're taking part in the Vote to End Hunger campaign, a national grassroots movement asking U.S. officials to make ending hunger a priority. We hope you'll join us. 🙏

*Jihad Saleh*

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Vote to End Hunger!

1. Register to vote.
2. Join Islamic Relief's "I Vote to End Hunger" advocacy campaign.
3. Pick up the Advocacy Playbook produced by the Alliance to End Hunger. ([alliancetoendhunger.org/advocacy-playbook](http://alliancetoendhunger.org/advocacy-playbook))
4. Attend a town hall meeting with 2016 candidates, and ask them to outline their plan to end hunger in America.
5. Share your views on "I Vote to End Hunger" with political candidates through their social media.
6. Use social media to invite your friends to get involved.
7. On Election Day in November, get out and vote for a candidate who you believe will end hunger.

## IRUSA SPEAKS AT UNITED NATIONS EVENTS

As an international development organization, Islamic Relief USA represents Islamic humanitarian values to international leaders and institutions, including the United Nations. Through advocacy, IRUSA brings an Islamic perspective on reducing poverty and hunger, and works to influence world leaders' decisions to help those in need.

In September 2015, IRUSA took part in a U.N. summit in New York to announce new Sustainable Development Goals meant to foster peace, a healthy planet and prosperity for all people. Two IRUSA staff members and CEO Anwar Khan were present at the U.N. General Assembly to welcome the 17 new global goals, which include ending poverty and hunger. Khan was invited to take part in two high-level meetings there, to share the experiences and perspective of our donors and

beneficiaries and to work to find solutions on how to address humanitarian issues.

In March 2016, an IRUSA team returned to New York for the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women. The theme this year was women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development, as well as prevention of violence against women and girls.

Islamic Relief was honored to have been chosen to organize three events on topics ranging from the eradication of domestic abuse to women's empowerment through microfinance. CEO Khan also took the stage with other faith leaders to take a stand against using religion to justify violence. 🙏

*Jihad Saleh*

## MEDIA MENTIONS

Your work through IRUSA was mentioned in numerous media channels throughout the past year.

A few highlights:

- "Syrian refugees join volunteers helping to feed homeless US war veterans"—"The Telegraph," Nov. 26, 2015
- "From Lesbos to Flint — an Islamic Relief Group Helps the Poor Get Safe Water"—Public Radio International, Feb. 5, 2016
- "Islamic Relief USA: Doing Good Through Diversity"—"Philanthropy Journal," April 4, 2016
- Video: AJ+ and the Huffington Post both created videos on IRUSA's work in Flint.

## RAMADAN & EID 2015

- White House Iftar: CEO Anwar Khan and our Director of Public Affairs Christina Tobias-Nahi were invited to celebrate Ramadan with President Obama and other foreign dignitaries honoring Muslims making contributions in the US especially youth.
- Capitol Hill Dinner: Last summer, IRUSA hosted its fifth annual Capitol Hill Ramadan Welcome Dinner. Many members of Congress shared welcoming remarks and learned about IRUSA activities.
- World Bank Conference and Iftar: IRUSA co-sponsored the World Bank's first conference on religion and sustainable development last Ramadan. CEO Anwar Khan spoke on a panel at the conference. Also as part of the event, the World Bank also held its first ever iftar jointly with Islamic Relief; World Bank President Jim Yong Kim spoke at the iftar.

- Awareness-Raising Eid Celebration: IRUSA co-hosted with the Millennium Challenge Corporation an Eid celebration to commit to our shared goal of elimination global poverty hosted at the residence of the Indonesian ambassador.

## SPRING 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

- IRUSA Attends State Department Ceremony on Women: IRUSA staff attended the U.S. Department of State's annual International Women of Courage ceremony in March where distinguished women from all corners of the world were recognized. Welcoming remarks were made by State Dept Secretary John Kerry and Vice President Joe Biden.
- IRUSA Hosts Forum on Refugees: IRUSA hosted a forum at InterAction's forum in April. The forum examined refugees' work situations and rights in the United States and Europe.
- CEO Re-Elected to USAID Committee: CEO Anwar Khan was recently re-elected to serve another term on USAID's Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid.



Rep. Keith Ellison at IRUSA Dinner.

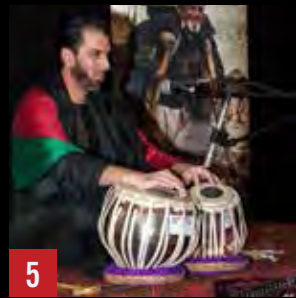


Jim Yong Kim speaks at the World Bank.



IRUSA's team at the U.N. summit.

# IRUSA SPECIAL EVENTS



1: Dawud Wharnsby performs at Songs for the Children; 2: Motivational Speaker Dalia Mogahed on the Syria 5 Year tour; 3,4: 2nd Annual Art Gala; 5,6: Salar Nader on the Afghanistan Tour; 7,8: Walk for Water; 9,10,11,12: Grand Iftars across the nation with Activist Linda Sarsour, IRUSA Creative Director Ridwan Adhami, Imam Siraj Wahhaj and Imam Zaid Shakir; 13: Director of Fund Division Azhar Azeez on the Pakistan Development Tour; 14,15,16: IRUSA team members Hamayoun Jamali, Khalid Bakali, Mansoor Sakhiy and Yousef Abdallah visit projects in Afghanistan; 17: Team IRUSA at the 40 for 40 Bike Challenge



## NEW PODCAST INVITES YOU BEHIND THE SCENES

If a picture is worth 1,000 words, what's a sound worth?

At IRUSA, we think the sounds of YOUR work being done are worth listening to!

So we've created a new podcast for your listening pleasure. It's called "What a Relief!" And if you like puns like the one above, you're going to love this podcast.

Every week, IRUSA's social media specialist B.C. Dodge and IRUSA's friend R. Mordant Mahon (who you might know from the fun and inspirational "Success Freaks" podcast) sit down with staff and volunteers to talk about your work here in the United States and abroad. Sometimes they even connect with people who are on location, doing the work as they speak.

Recent guests have included an IRUSA disaster response team leader talking about his time on the shores of Greece, hip-hop artist Omar Offendum talking about Syria and speaker Dalia Mogahed talking about work in the U.S.

And there is much, much more planned for upcoming shows! 🎧



## SO HOW CAN YOU LISTEN?

You can download and listen right from [IRUSA.org/podcasts](https://www.irusa.org/podcasts)

You can also find us on [Blurbrry.com](https://www.blurbrry.com), [Android](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.blurbrry), [iTunes](https://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/details?id=1444444444), and [Stitcher Radio](https://www.stitcher.com/channel/irusa).

**COME AND HEAR HOW YOU'RE WORKING TOGETHER FOR A BETTER WORLD!**

## MEET IRUSA ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We hope you've enjoyed this Partnership magazine, and now we hope you'll connect with us throughout the year ahead. No matter which is your favorite social media channel, you can probably find IRUSA there. We're on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Periscope, YouTube Blab and Snapchat.

See the latest updates on delivery of your aid, get questions answered and join the conversation.



[facebook.com/IslamicReliefUSA](https://facebook.com/IslamicReliefUSA)



[IslamicReliefUS](https://www.snapchat.com/add/IslamicReliefUS)



[IslamicReliefUSA.tumblr.com](https://IslamicReliefUSA.tumblr.com)



[@IslamicRelief](https://twitter.com/IslamicRelief)



[youtube.com/IslamicRelief](https://youtube.com/IslamicRelief)



[Islamic Relief USA](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Islamic-Relief-USA)



[@IslamicReliefUSA](https://www.instagram.com/IslamicReliefUSA)



[pinterest.com/IRUSA](https://pinterest.com/IRUSA)



[Islamic Relief USA](https://www.google.com/+IslamicReliefUSA)

## 'IT ALL COMES DOWN TO PRIORITIES'



Alexandra-Ola Chaic (bottom left) and her father Zakaria Shaikh (7th from right) drove from Virginia to join IRUSA's team in Michigan.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER DRIVE 18 HOURS TO VOLUNTEER

**Flint, Michigan, is a long way from the East Coast, and not many people would make that drive to volunteer to deliver water. But for one father/daughter pair from Virginia, volunteering was simply their priority one weekend last February, so they made the drive.**

"It all comes down to priorities," said Zakaria Shaikh. "Everybody has the same number of hours, but what do you do with those hours? Allah is going to ask us.

"If there's a disaster or emergency, you triage—what is the most important thing that needs to be addressed at this time? That particular weekend, for us, it was that particular thing.

"We ask Allah that we always prioritize service to Allah's creations, which is really service to Allah."

So Shaikh and his 12-year-old daughter Alexandra-Ola hit the road and drove to Michigan.

They met up with IRUSA's team in Flint. There, staff and volunteers were delivering water to residents whose tap water was unsafe to use.

"I wanted to do something to help

a cause that really disturbed me," Alexandra-Ola said. "The best part was when I actually got to sit in the U-Haul truck, even though we did get lost."

Alexandra-Ola enjoyed helping, and she also enjoyed the volunteers' bond.

"When we were all there, I felt like we were all on the same level," she said. "I felt on a spiritual sense like we were all kin, because we were all there for the same reason—serving our community and giving them what they needed."

Her father said their 18-hour round trip shouldn't be seen as something exceptional.

"Alhamdulillah, we're thankful for the opportunity to serve," he said. "We have all the blessings. When you get up in the morning and you have health, food and a place to sleep, you have ample reasons to be thankful to Allah."

Islam comes with responsibilities, he said: "One of these I strongly believe is doing such a thing that we did."

Shaikh deflected praise to the IRUSA team leaders.

"I want to mention the great work that Islamic Relief is doing," he said. "There's a lot of staging for volunteers to come and take advantage of this training; local coalition building. A lot of behind-the-scenes work that Islamic

Relief does to provide a platform within which people can come and engage productively. Without that, you have haphazard efforts that don't have a focus and have very little impact.

"You have to have a focus, and Islamic Relief provided that focus for us."

Alexandra-Ola added, "One of the beautiful things about Islamic Relief is that you don't have to be Muslim for Islamic Relief to help you, and you don't have to be Muslim to join Islamic Relief either."

Shaikh said, "We saw that there. We saw someone driving by and said 'I saw you guys and just decided to join.'"

For Alexandra-Ola, there was nowhere else she would have rather been that weekend.

"I felt really proud to be there with everybody—helping and delivering clean water for them to drink," she said. 🙏

*Lina Hashem*

The father-daughter pair deliver water together in the snow.



Young volunteers prepare corn for distribution in Washington, D.C.

### ON IRUSA VOLUNTEER TEAM, SOMETIMES YOUTH LEAD THE WAY

**Before he even became volunteer manager, Said Durrah was at a conference once, sitting at IRUSA's booth, while some young people were filling out volunteer applications. They asked where they should put the forms.**

**"I'd say, 'Put it in the donation box,'" he says. "And they'd always be taken aback."**

But to Durrah, that's exactly where it belongs, because volunteer service is a donation—an invaluable one.

IRUSA's volunteers in 2015-2016 spanned the country, representing many backgrounds and even many faiths. And they ranged in age from senior citizens down to the toddler who carefully dropped granola bars into lunch bags for the homeless.

In fact, young volunteers often make a very large impact. In California this spring, two eighth-graders—Najm Masri and Mariam Mustafa—led a drive at their school that raised \$3,000 for Syrian refugees.

Meanwhile, across the country in Virginia, students at Al-Fatih Academy in Reston also worked for Syrian refugees making welcome kits. While the 40 students and teachers at One Step Ahead in Ashburn raised \$5000 and gathered much needed clothing and supplies for refugees.

At the college level, Muslim Students Associations across the country gave back this year in many ways, including through Project Sadaqa. The MSAs competed with one another to raise funds for Syrian refugees through an MSA Showdown.

More than 200 students represented 19 universities at the event hosted in Texas. The associations each set up web pages to raise awareness and funds. Together, they raised \$16,442.

IRUSA staff hope to see more projects started by volunteers—of all ages, backgrounds and faiths—in the coming year. If you want to help, IRUSA wants you there.

"It's not necessarily the size of the resume—it's the size of the heart," Durrah says.

He invites you to join one of the activities already planned, or plan one of your own.

"YOU create a project," he says. "Some of the best projects we've ever had were created by volunteers. They say, 'We want to do this, we just need a little bit of support.' And we support them.

**"It's your time."** 🙏

*Chancey Gannett*

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**IRUSA wants YOU! Please join our volunteer team at [irusa.org/volunteer](http://irusa.org/volunteer) or email [volunteers@irusa.org](mailto:volunteers@irusa.org).**



Assalamu alaikum!

Abu Huraira narrated a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said,

*“He who is not grateful to people  
is not grateful to Allah.”*

In the tradition of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), I want to thank you all for your work in the past year for your brothers and sisters in humanity.

I thank the generous donors, who give, from the smallest amounts to the largest amounts. This includes those who may not have much to give, but they support this work and the beneficiaries through their prayers. You do not know how much it means to us. We pray that Allah accepts from you and your families and grants you endless rewards.

I thank our volunteers who are found all across the country, from the children helping assemble meals for the homeless to our volunteer board of directors. Whether you assist us in hosting Walks for Water, volunteer at a fundraiser, serve food, deploy to an emergency with our team, or advocate on the behalf of the beneficiaries—we thank you.

I thank the staff of Islamic Relief USA who go above and beyond their job descriptions to ensure that our beneficiaries are receiving the aid that our donors have generously provided.

I want to thank our beneficiaries. What we provide to them is not a charity. It is the right that we owe them as our brothers and sisters in need. They pray for us and for you. It's an honor to be at their service.

And most importantly, we thank Allah (the Most High, the Exalted) for His countless blessings that He has bestowed upon all of us. We thank Him for allowing us to serve this cause.

We are looking forward to increasing our work together in the years ahead. Our strategic plan for the next five years includes more sustainable programs for our neighbors in the United States, and more development programs in Africa where there is tremendous need. We invite our volunteers to engage with us on all levels of our organizational efforts, and we are excited about new opportunities to educate, organize and join with you to advocate for the real issues facing all of humanity. We need to be the voices for those who are voiceless.

We pray that Allah accepts from all of us our good deeds and forgives us for our shortcomings!

Thank you.

Khaled Lamada  
Chairman of the Board of the Directors  
Islamic Relief USA

# THANK YOU



# ISLAMIC RELIEF USA

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