

HASENE CONCENTRATES ITS ZAKAT CAMPAIGN ON REFUGEES AND WAR VICTIMS THIS YEAR

Hasene International continues to respond to the appeals of the needy worldwide, driven by a strong sense of social responsibility. This year, with a focus on war victims and refugees, Hasene directs its *zakat* campaign to uphold the shared values of humanity and foster solidarity. We had a conversation with Bekir Altaş, President of Hasene International, delving into the specifics of the campaign, particularly the *zakat* initiatives in conflict zones

Can you outline Hasene's zakat activities?

As the Hasene family, we perceive *zakat* as a fundamental principle of Islam designed to address societal challenges and fulfill its needs. We view *zakat* as a **social assistance system** and strive to promote **both individual and communal advancement** within this framework. *Zakat* represents a holistic form of worship, encompassing endeavors such as enhancing social welfare, aiding individuals burdened by significant debt, assisting recent converts to Islam, and allocating resources to critical areas like education and healthcare. Furthermore, our *zakat* contributions will support the establishment of institutions dedicated to fostering the future prospects of Muslim youth living in Europe.

How do you deliver zakat aid to those in need?

We employ a **multi-layered system** to deliver *zakat* aid to those in need. To ensure the precise targeting of aid recipients, meticulous assessment of needs is paramount. Consequently, we conduct thorough field studies, collaborating closely with local NGOs and authorities. These efforts culminate in the creation of comprehensive profiles detailing the specific circumstances of individuals and families requiring assistance. These profiles encompass various factors including family size, ages of members, as well as health and income statuses.

Once needs are identified, we formulate a **customized assistance plan for each family**. This plan encompasses essential requirements, as well as considerations for education, healthcare, and housing needs. Aid distribution to eligible recipients is done by our on-site teams in collaboration with local NGOs. To ensure proper utilization and accountability, we deploy *zakat* observers during distributions, accompanied by documentation through photos and videos.

Following aid distribution, we conduct **monitoring and evaluation activities** to assess its impact. Throughout the year, our *zakat* observers conduct audits to verify the effectiveness and appropriateness of the aid provided. Based on the findings from these audits, aid plans are revised and an improved assistance system is established.

In which regions are projects developed?

We implement our *zakat* projects in approximately one hundred countries and regions annually. While the specific regions of focus may vary each year, our overarching objective remains the same: to provide assistance to those in need. This year, our efforts are particularly concentrated on supporting **war victims and refugees**. We have planned special projects in areas including **Palestine, with a specific emphasis on Gaza, as well as Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan, Ukraine, Crimea, and Nepal**.

What specific projects are you planning to implement in these regions?

The projects we have planned vary based on the specific needs of each region. Generally, our focus is on addressing basic necessities such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, we aim to provide assistance that goes beyond one-time financial or material aid, seeking to establish **sustainable sources of income for beneficiaries**. For instance, we provide families in need with tools like sewing machines and overlockers, assist in opening shops, and support animal husbandry initiatives. Through these interventions, families can generate stable and sustainable income streams for themselves.

What is the current situation in Gaza?

In Gaza, the current situation is dire, marked by a severe humanitarian crisis stemming from the conflict that erupted in October 2023. Over the past six months, more than 100,000 individuals have either been killed, injured, or gone missing as a result of the war. This staggering figure represents approximately 5 percent of Gaza's total population. The ongoing hostilities have resulted in widespread destruction of homes, schools, healthcare facilities, and other vital infrastructure. Tragically, thousands of individuals in Gaza are either succumbing to starvation and dehydration or are at imminent risk of doing so. Coordination meetings with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) have revealed a concerning surge in child malnutrition due to the growing scarcity of food and clean water, coupled with a rise in diseases.

What is the status of Hasene's work in Gaza, and what is being done there?

Given the abovementioned dire circumstances, the Hasene family has prioritized emergency relief efforts in Gaza. Our focus is on addressing the fundamental needs of families, particularly their nutritional requirements. Through the distribution of essential food items such as flour, legumes, and canned goods, **we have been able to reach approximately 70,000 individuals** thus far. Furthermore, our **preparations are underway to deliver 450,000 units of canned meat** to the region.

In addition to food assistance, we have provided tents, hygiene kits, and medical supplies to Gaza. We have also taken necessary steps to address needs identified in coordination meetings, including sanitation, clean water, and the provision of ambulances. **Our food support initiatives will remain ongoing throughout the month of Ramadan.**

Do you have any plans to address the needs of missing children and orphans in Gaza?

As part of our projects in Gaza, we are dedicated to reuniting missing children with their families and locating and supporting foster families for orphans. It is estimated that there are over 17,000 unaccompanied children or children separated from their families as a result of the conflict. With at least 10,000 children having lost one parent, this figure is expected to reach at least 27,000. These vulnerable children lack essential necessities such as safety, nutrition, healthcare, education, protection, and psychological support. Our focus is on facilitating communication between these children and their families, reuniting them with relatives, providing access to healthcare, education, and protection services, and assisting them in coping with psychological challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

What are the specifics of the “Support for Orphans and Missing Children in Gaza Project”?

As part of our *zakat* campaign, we are collaborating with UNRWA to implement a project aimed at assisting orphaned and missing children in Gaza. The objective of this project is to offer both material and moral support to orphaned children in Gaza, ensuring their fundamental needs are met and facilitating their access to education, healthcare, protection services, and enhancing their psychosocial well-being.

The project encompasses various initiatives, including conducting assessments to identify missing children, evaluating associated risks and special requirements, and establishing referral pathways. Additionally, efforts are underway to identify suitable foster families for these children and address their educational needs as best as possible. **Financial assistance is also planned for families who choose to adopt or care for these children.** The project aims to assist approximately 5,000 orphaned children in its initial phase.

What kind of initiatives will you undertake in Gaza post-war?

As the Hasene family, our commitment to Gaza extends beyond the war’s conclusion. In the aftermath, as we gain a clearer understanding of the extent of destruction and the pressing needs, **our focus will shift towards the region’s reconstruction and the implementation of sustainable projects for those in need.**

Post-war, we anticipate greater duties and responsibilities ahead. Your support is crucial now more than ever to fulfill these endeavors. **By donating your *zakat* to Hasene, you can serve as a beacon of hope for Gaza.**

Can you tell us about UNRWA's activities?

UNRWA, established in 1949 as a UN agency, serves the Palestinian refugees displaced during the *Nakba*, or the "Great Catastrophe". **The agency's primary mission is to provide humanitarian aid and protection to Palestinian refugees until a just and lasting solution to their plight is achieved.** Presently, UNRWA boasts a workforce of 30,000 employees, catering to around 6 million registered Palestinian refugees, including roughly 540,000 children receiving education in its schools. Operating across 60 refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, UNRWA delivers essential humanitarian aid to the millions of Palestinians residing in these camps. Its comprehensive services encompass education, healthcare, relief and social services, infrastructure development, and emergency assistance. **UNRWA's continued presence is vital in upholding the international refugee status of these Palestinian refugees and ensuring their protection**, thereby safeguarding their access to fundamental human rights.

When did Hasene's collaboration with UNRWA begin and what is its main purpose?

In 2020, the Hasene family entered into a strategic cooperation agreement with UNRWA as part of our commitment to aiding the Palestinian people and refugees. This collaboration marks a significant milestone in establishing a long-term partnership and enhancing our refugee assistance initiatives.

The cooperation between Hasene and UNRWA serves to prevent duplication of aid efforts and promotes more effective resource utilization through joint planning and coordination. By adopting this approach, we expand the reach and effectiveness of our aid programs while ensuring the **sustainability and continuity** of refugee support. Through this partnership, Palestinian refugees gain improved access to education, healthcare, and social services, thereby **offering them hope and prospects within Palestine.**

What do your relief efforts in Jordan and Lebanon involve?

In the Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan and Lebanon, our relief efforts encompass various areas including humanitarian aid, food assistance, healthcare, hygiene, education, and development initiatives. **Initially, humanitarian aid was provided to 15,000 Palestinian refugees** as part of our efforts. Additionally, unemployed refugee families receive support for income generation to help improve their livelihoods.

What is the situation with Sudan and Nepal?

The armed conflicts that erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023, led to the displacement of approximately 8.1 million people, making it **one of the biggest refugee crises of our time**. Sudan is also home to nearly one million refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea. The humanitarian situation in all 18 states, especially in the Darfur region, has escalated to the level of disaster. In Central Darfur, for example, water is available, but displaced people cannot meet their water needs, and 52 percent have no access to healthcare at all. For the remaining 48 percent, healthcare is inadequate. That's why food, clean water, and sanitation projects are vital.

On the other hand, one of the most effective ways for people to rebuild their lives with dignity and safety is through the ability to work and earn a living themselves. For this reason, we plan to provide training to refugee families in business management and entrepreneurial skills, as well as grant start-up capital for income-generating activities.

We have also developed special projects for Arakanese refugees in Nepal. In addition to addressing their basic needs, we plan to work on housing, education, and health initiatives. Additionally, we strive to ensure that they can obtain work permits to sustain themselves financially.

How can people donate zakat to Hasene International?

There are several ways to donate *zakat* to Hasene International. Firstly, you can donate *zakat* **online** through Hasene's official website (www.hasene.org). Alternatively, you can donate *zakat* **over the phone**. Additionally, you have the option to donate *zakat* to Hasene's designated bank accounts via **wire transfer** or **EFT**. Lastly, you can donate using ***zakat envelopes provided by Hasene***. These envelopes can be obtained from Hasene offices or mosques affiliated with the Islamic Society Millî Görüş (IGMG). Once filled, you can return the envelopes to Hasene offices or IGMG mosques.

Thank you for your time.

Thank you. May our Almighty Lord accept our *zakat* and acts of charity (*sadaqa*), both what we've given and what we'll give, in a way most pleasing to Him. May He include us among His servants who gain His good pleasure.