



MULTIFAITH ALLIANCE FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

2017 YEAR END REVIEW





Multifaith Alliance for Syria Refugees

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Cover Page: Syrian children at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan.

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Founder's Message



Dr. Georgette Bennett lectures at Chautauqua. (Photo: Bria Granville, The Chautauqua Daily)

To our valued supporters:

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the work we have accomplished together to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

In 2017, the Syrian civil war continued into its seventh devastating year, and the Administration attempted, by Executive Order, to close the doors to travelers and refugees from Muslim-majority countries. Nevertheless, the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (MFA) was able to dramatically increase the flow of relief to those trapped in the region. As the culmination of efforts it began in 2014, MFA was able to facilitate unprecedented partnerships between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Syrian NGOs. The result was a new channel of humanitarian relief through which containers of relief are shipped to Israeli ports, trucked by the IDF to the Golan Heights — and delivered to MFA's Syrian NGO partners for distribution to those in need in southwest Syria.

In this, the channel's first full year of operation, MFA and its partners have coordinated the shipment of more than \$66 million of essential relief to a region of 1.5 million people in southern Syria. Former adversaries are now working as partners, suspicion and enmity are being replaced with mutual trust and a shared humanitarian purpose — and the success is inspiring a new generation on both sides of the border

Throughout 2017, MFA has also continued to advocate for sensible and humane refugee policies and to raise public awareness about the crisis — both in the U.S. and abroad. We have broadened our network as MFA has now grown to 90 participating organizations. We have formed new alliances with humanitarian relief organizations, advocacy groups, and a range of faith-based and secular groups. Our work has been covered in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and *The National Interest*.

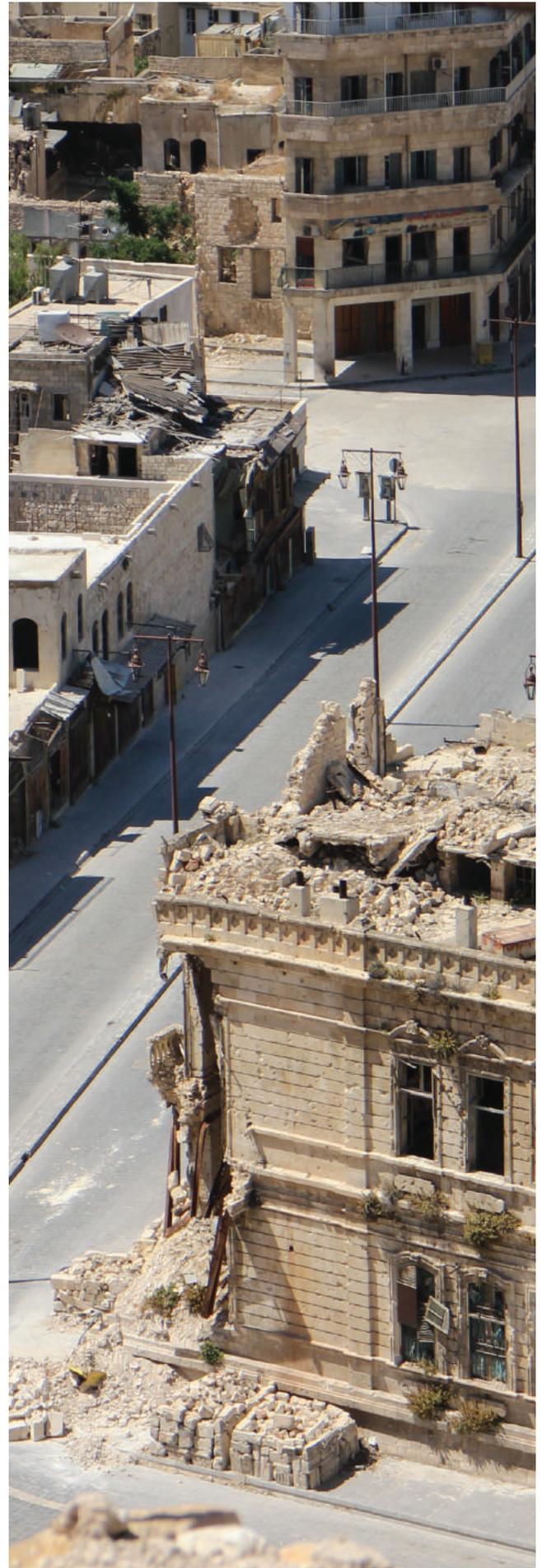
This success is dramatically raising MFA's profile, and has created new opportunities for outreach in the media, with humanitarian aid groups, in Washington and with potential new supporters. We view 2018 as the year to capitalize on this range of opportunities and build our capacity to pursue our mission and to better respond to the desperate needs in the region. Starting with our plan to increase the number of relief containers shipped through the new channel by more than 75%, we believe this will be a transformational year for MFA.

Simply stated, MFA's mission is rooted in the shared belief of all great faiths to care for the stranger. It is this imperative that will continue to inspire our ongoing commitment for the coming year. We are extremely grateful for your past loyalty, and we ask for your continued support as we seek to enhance our impact, create greater awareness of the crisis and better serve those in need.

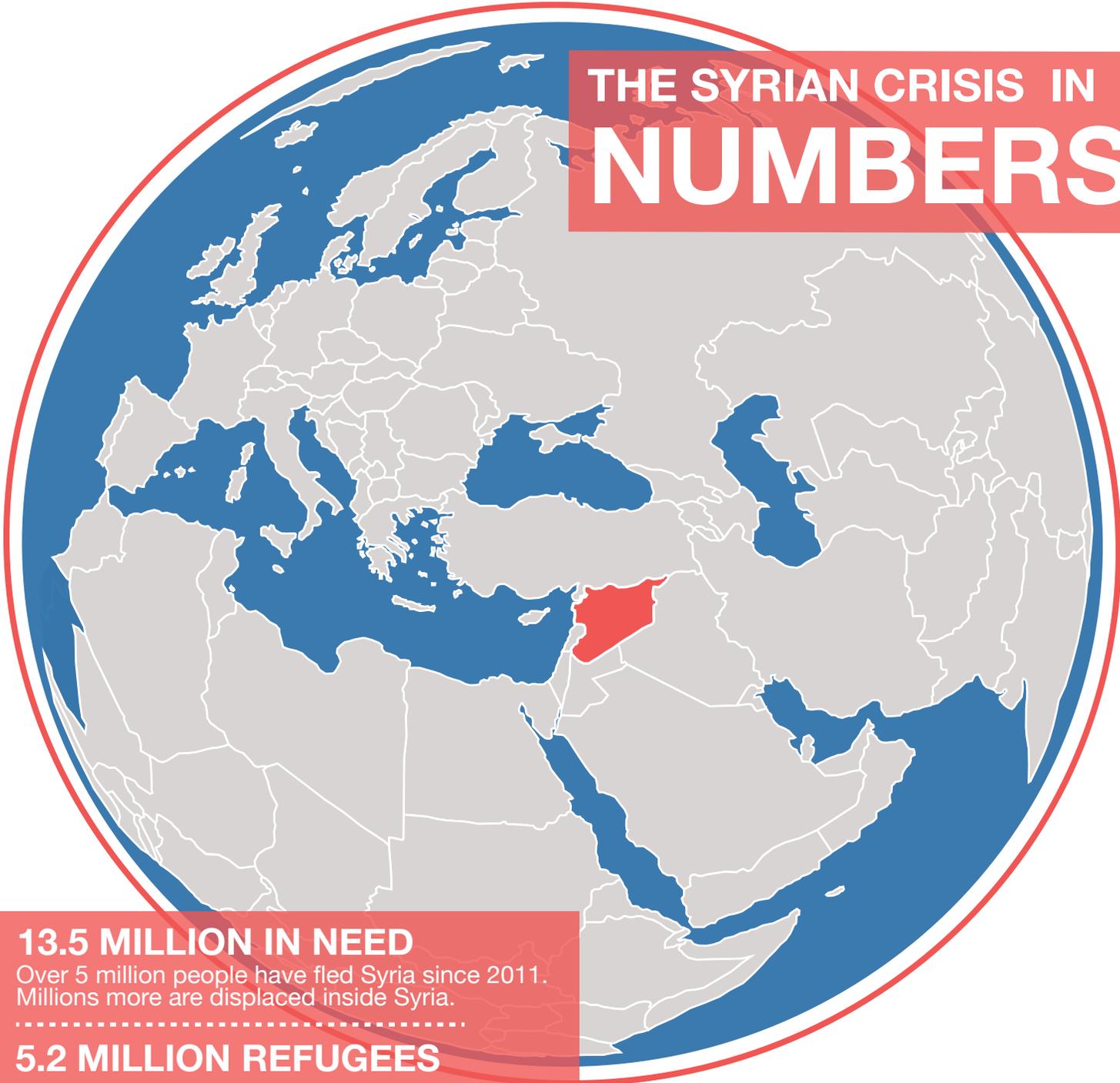
We wish you the very best for the coming year,
and share our wishes for hope and peace,



Georgette Bennett
Founder
Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees



Destruction in Aleppo, Syria.



THE SYRIAN CRISIS IN NUMBERS

13.5 MILLION IN NEED

Over 5 million people have fled Syria since 2011. Millions more are displaced inside Syria.

.....

5.2 MILLION REFUGEES

Majority have fled to neighboring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.

.....

6.3 MILLION IDPs

Millions of people inside Syria have become forcibly displaced from their homes.

.....

500,000 KILLED

An estimated 500,000 killed due to ongoing bombing and fighting.



Syrian children at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan.

MFA's Mission The Interfaith Response

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (MFA), the nation's leading interfaith response to the Syrian crisis, is comprised of 90 participating organizations raising a united call in support of Syrian war victims. Its mission is to:

- **Mobilize** the interfaith response to the crisis.
- **Advocate** for sensible and humane refugee policies.
- **Cultivate** groundbreaking partnerships in the region.
- **Raise** funds for humanitarian relief.
- **Create** awareness of the facts, needs, and opportunities for positive action.

MFA: A History of Adapting to a Shifting Landscape

Since its founding in 2013, MFA has demonstrated the ability to rapidly adapt to the shifting landscape in the U.S., Europe and Syria by prioritizing whatever parts of our mission were the most likely to be fruitful at the time. However, MFA has always adhered to its mission, raising awareness, providing lifesaving aid and laying the groundwork to create transformational relationships in the region.

2013-2014

Laying the Groundwork

As the Syrian civil war expanded, civilians were increasingly targeted by both government and militant opposition groups. In response to the growing number of refugees seeking to reach Europe, some EU countries raised obstacles to admission, and it was reported that over 75% of the registered refugees in neighboring countries were women and children, who were particularly vulnerable to harassment and exploitation.

Responding to the Crisis

MFA's initial focus was on creating awareness of the crisis through presentations and briefings, and raising funds with our partner, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), to help provide essential relief and services, including food, sanitary packages, and trauma counseling.

Early Humanitarian Aid

During this time, MFA began to promote the work of Israeli NGOs which were providing aid to Syrians and also, highlight the importance of Syrian-Israeli engagement.

Destruction in Aleppo, Syria.



2014-2015

Raising Awareness

The crisis escalated with intensified attacks on civilians by both government and extremist forces. By August 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights put the death toll from the conflict at 191,000, and there were reports of chemical weapons attacks and the use of cluster and barrel bombs. The UN also estimated that 7.6 million Syrians were internally displaced and that 12.2 million were in need of humanitarian assistance. Yet, in the U.S. there was a shocking lack of awareness by the media and the general public.

National & International Briefings

In response, MFA devoted an increasing amount of its resources to raising awareness, conducting briefings nationally and internationally, to audiences such as the Canadian Parliament, the European Parliament, and the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Because Israel shares a border with Syria, MFA also began to advocate for the use of Israel as a staging area for the outbound delivery of international humanitarian relief into Syria, including in meetings with Israeli ministries.

At the same time, MFA began to develop the relationships that ultimately grew into its network of Syrian NGO partners.

Georgette Bennett speaks with a Jordanian Lieutenant in February 2015 at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan.



2015-2016

Fostering New Partnerships

Abuses of the civilian population continued. By February 2016, the death toll from the conflict was placed at 470,000, and the UN reported that an estimated 4.8 million were seeking refuge abroad. Neighboring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, sought to curb the massive inflow of refugees with administrative, legal and even physical barriers.

International sympathy, galvanized when a Syrian Kurdish toddler washed up on shore in Turkey, turned quickly to hostility with the rise of right-wing nationalism and fear induced by terror attacks in Europe and the U.S.

MFA increased its efforts to counter the fear of refugee resettlement and to advocate for sensible and humane policies.

Syrian-Israeli Engagement

Critically, in the fall of 2016, MFA's aspirations for Israeli involvement in the delivery of international humanitarian aid were realized when it was approached by the IDF for assistance in identifying potential Syrian partners for what would become Operation Good Neighbor, a humanitarian aid project begun in 2016 to help the population in southern Syria.

MFA seized the opportunity to bring together its network of Syrian NGOs and the IDF – facilitating cooperation between former adversaries in what would become groundbreaking partnerships.

Before the end of the year, MFA's first two shipments of humanitarian aid were successfully delivered through the new channel.

Joint Congressional Briefing in May 2016 with Dr. Georgette Bennett, Representative David N. Cicilline (D-RI), F. Murray Abraham, and Shadi Martini, MFA's Director of Humanitarian Relief and Regional Relations.



2017

Delivering Humanitarian Aid

The New Normal

In 2017, a new Administration took office in the U.S. and the refugee resettlement landscape took another dramatic turn with the issuance of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee Executive Orders, a drastic reduction in refugee admissions, and proposed cuts to appropriations for resettlement and humanitarian assistance.

MFA maintained its focus on raising awareness, and advocating for rational and humane refugee policies.

New Aid Program Begins

MFA was primed to continue its work to alleviate the suffering of Syria's war victims as its years of work forming a network and building partnerships reached fruition with the first full year of deployment of the new channel.

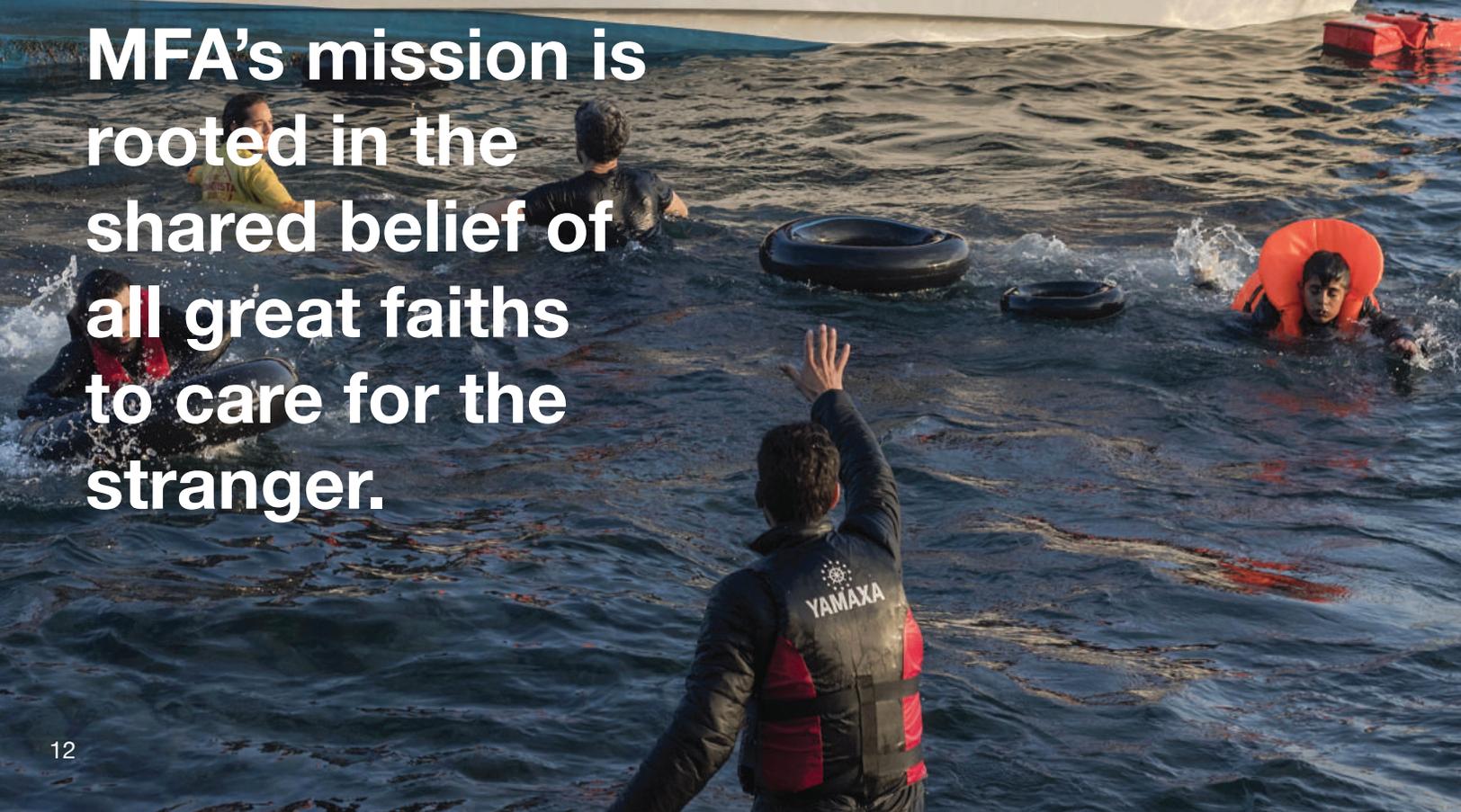
Medical supplies arriving to partner NGOs in southern Syria in October 2017.





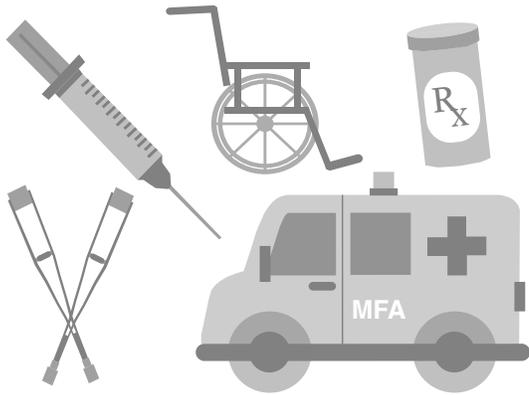
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MFA's mission is rooted in the shared belief of all great faiths to care for the stranger.



Humanitarian Aid

With its years of delicate back-channel efforts having led to the establishment of the unprecedented partnerships between Syrian NGOs and the Israel Defense Forces, MFA has been instrumental in coordinating the effort to provide desperately-needed humanitarian relief to previously hard-to-reach areas in southern Syria.



\$85.1 Million in Medicines & Medical Equipment

Including antibiotics, pain relievers, wheelchairs, crutches, and ambulances.



\$696,000 in Clothing & Personal Care Items

Including winter clothing, shirts, pants, dresses, toothpaste, soap, and diapers.



\$108,000 in Food & Household Items

Including flours, grains, cereals, preserves, canned foods, baby formula, and detergents.

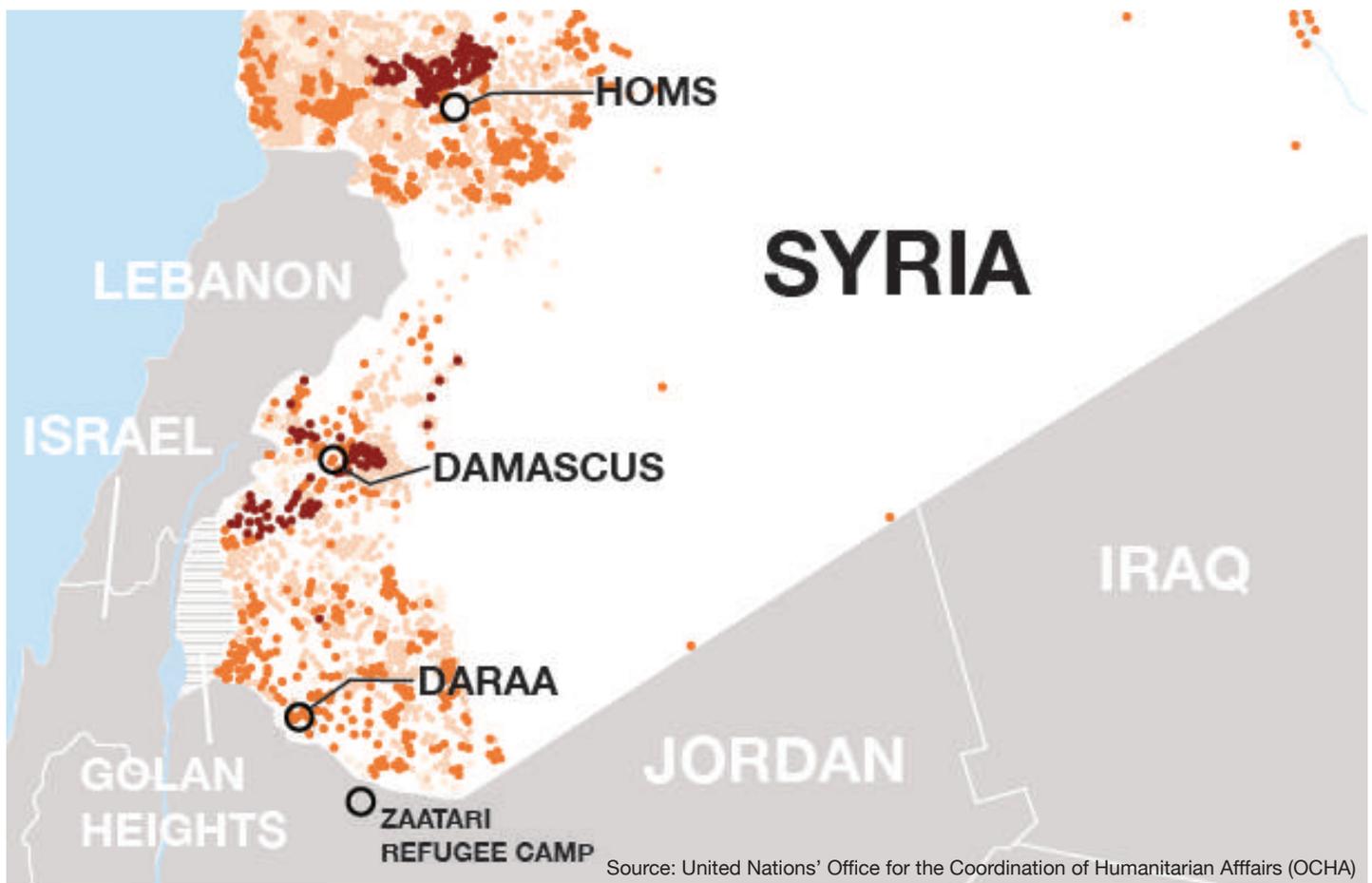
MFA has facilitated the delivery of 27 containers of humanitarian aid valued at \$66 million to villages in southern Syria in the past year, including: clothing, blankets, medicine, medical supplies and equipment –and even four ambulances. The steady flow of humanitarian aid through the new channel is reaching an area of 1.5 million people.

From Aid to Development

Given the success of the new channel, MFA, the IDF and its Syrian NGO partners are now expanding their efforts to pursue not just aid – but self-sufficiency through a range of associated projects such as:

- Refurbishing a hospital on the Israel-Syria border, with water and electricity furnished by the IDF;
- Building a bakery that will produce 15,000 loaves of pita bread daily and provide jobs;
- Re-opening a maternity hospital in Daara that already has welcomed dozens of new babies;
- Supporting a family clinic on the Syrian side of the border;
- Assisting a Syrian TV network in producing an Arabic language TV news series about life in Israel and the new humanitarian aid channel for distribution by media outlets throughout the Middle East; and
- Establishing agricultural and dairy farms that will provide both food and employment.

MFA's efforts and relationships with a range of relief agencies throughout the world also have opened opportunities for aid to be delivered to other areas inside Syria, as well as to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.



Southern Syria's Population in Need

Severity of humanitarian needs in southern Syria.



Fund A Container

A New Way to Send Aid

MFA's newest initiative is the launch of its Fund A Container program. Donors can pay the cost of shipping a container of life-saving humanitarian aid from the U.S. to those in need in Syria, and track its progress from packing to its arrival. The cost to ship each container is \$5,500, which presents a great opportunity for individual donors, congregations and community organizations to become involved and gain a sense of ownership in this program.

Participating Organizations

An Interfaith Network

With the addition of 12 new members in 2017, MFA now consists of 90 participating organizations that are committed to responding to the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Our participating organizations include faith-based and secular organizations, local volunteer-led groups and international aid organizations. This past year, MFA implemented both a newsletter and a series of regular webinars for its participating organizations. Our participating organizations contributed in a variety of ways to alleviate the suffering of Syria's war victims:

- The Concerned Citizens for Syrian Refugees hosted a benefit concert to raise funds to support MFA's efforts;
- MFA and the Afya Foundation hosted the first of what will be a series of interfaith packing events at which volunteers of all ages sorted and packed medical equipment to be sent through the new channel;
- Rutgers Presbyterian Church worked in partnership with Church World Service to co-sponsor resettled Syrian refugee families;
- The International Refugee Assistance Project and HIAS filed a lawsuit against the Administration's Executive Order on immigrants and refugees;
- The Rahma Relief Foundation distributed meals, medical supplies, clothing, and other essential aid to Syrian refugees and those in need inside Syria.

Volunteers packing medical supplies at Afya Foundation in Yonkers, NY.





Dr. Georgette Bennett meets with His Holiness Pope Francis.

Public Outreach

MFA continues to raise awareness of the crisis and the opportunities for positive, personal involvement. Over the past year, Shadi Martini, MFA's Director of Humanitarian Relief and Regional Relations, gave a series of talks across the country, participated in webinars and podcasts, and was featured in *The Chicago Tribune*, *Marketplace* and *The Jerusalem Post*, providing his own first-hand accounts of the war and promoting MFA's humanitarian relief efforts.

In September, MFA hosted senior members of the IDF in New York for a series of meetings with humanitarian relief organizations and secular and faith-based groups such as the Archdiocese of New York and the Episcopal Diocese of New York.

MFA's Founder, Georgette Bennett, briefed international audiences on the Syrian crisis at venues including the Gregorian University in Rome and Chatham House in London. In connection with the Rome meeting, Georgette met Pope Francis and also engaged several senior Vatican officials to promote MFA's work.

Since its founding, MFA has reached close to 12,000 people through live presentations.

Policy

A Call to Action

MFA has developed a credible, effective federal policy arm. MFA's 2017 policy requests were deemed a clear, achievable blueprint for legislative action. In the past year, we have seen multiple efforts by the Administration to block travel from Muslim-majority countries and limit, or ban entirely, the arrival of refugees to the U.S. MFA has kept its network apprised of the latest political developments and has disseminated regular "calls to action" to provide practical ways to advocate on behalf of refugees.

MFA helped develop and disseminate Harvard Law School's recent publication: "Fulfilling U.S. Commitment to Refugee Resettlement: Protecting Refugees, Preserving National Security & Building the U.S. Economy through Refugee Admissions."

We also joined more than 50 interfaith, religious and interreligious organizations by signing on to briefs filed in federal courts that argued that the proposed Executive Order undermined religious freedom, discriminated against Muslims, offended fundamental values central to all major faiths, and interfered with the signers' refugee assistance efforts.

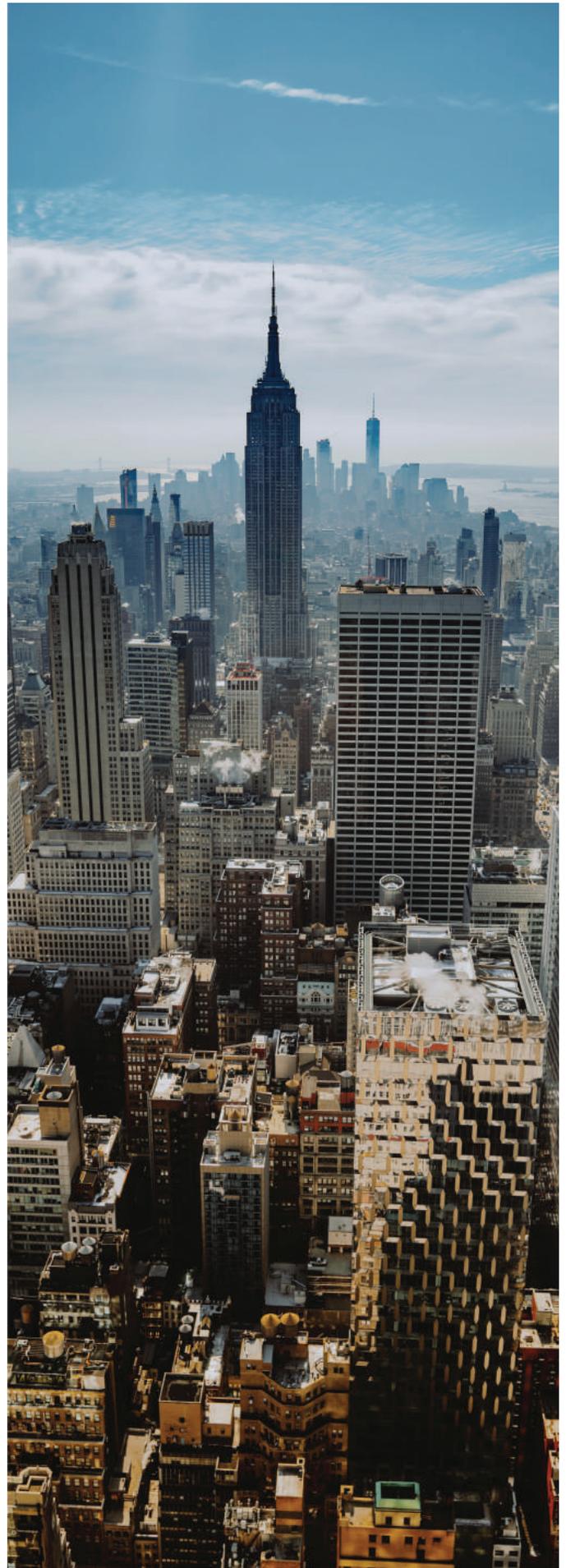
The U.S. Capitol, where MFA advocates for Syrian refugees.



Administrative and Operational Growth

A Growing Team

To provide greater flexibility and position us for future growth, in January 2017, MFA became a project of the Tides Center, which is dedicated to accelerating social change and serves as fiscal sponsor to more than 150 non-profits. This year, we also welcomed our new Executive Director, Bennett Gross, and three staff members: Ionut Gitan, Program Assistant for Humanitarian Relief; Isabella Rhodes, Assistant Coordinator for Operations; and Allyson Zacharoff, a long-time associate of MFA who is now Coordinator of Operations and Interfaith Strategy. In June, MFA became a member of Refugee Council USA, an important coalition of 25 U.S.-based NGOs whose collective voices serve as a powerful influence in supporting refugee resettlement.



MFA is headquartered in New York City.



Looking Forward to 2018

In its first full year of operation, the new channel has delivered millions of dollars of relief to those in need — and brought together former adversaries in the name of humanitarian relief. These efforts have changed hearts and minds on the ground and significantly raised MFA's profile with its constituents, the media and general public. This, in turn, has created a range of new opportunities for MFA to reach out to its existing and new audiences, create greater awareness of the crisis and garner broader support for its mission and the new channel.

To pursue these opportunities, during 2018, MFA plans to:

- Increase the number of container shipments through the new channel by more than 75%
- Significantly increase its communications and outreach efforts in both the U.S. and internationally
- Host cultivation briefings and a series of speaking tours
- Produce videos about the new channel, MFA's work and the impact on the ground
- Engage existing and potential new donors of humanitarian relief to increase contributions of the desperately needed supplies
- Redouble its efforts to reach and engage members of Congress
- Enhance its operational, logistical and administrative infrastructure to support the increased shipments and its overall increase in activity

Therefore, as busy and rewarding as 2017 has been, MFA has set even greater goals for 2018, and looks forward to building its capacity to deliver dramatically increased amounts of relief, and to capitalizing on the opportunities now before it.

It has been said that out of crisis comes opportunity. MFA is proud and gratified by the tangible difference it has been able to make in creating awareness and helping to ease suffering in the region. These accomplishments would not have been possible without the support we have received from foundations, donors, relief suppliers, and like-minded individuals who have been inspired to help.

With so much still to be done, we hope we can count on your continued support.

Donate at:

www.multifaithalliance.org/donate

MFA Major Supporters

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the numerous major donors that have supported MFA over the years. Your generosity and belief in our mission is a source of daily inspiration.

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Georgette Bennett and Leonard Polonsky
Jacob & Hilda Blaustein Foundation
Bloomberg Philanthropies
Charitable Ventures of Orange County
Concert for MFA - Orange County
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