

Editorial

Victor Grech

“Man's inhumanity to man, makes countless thousands mourn!” Robert Burns, 1784.

“It is a frightening thought that man also has a shadow side to him, consisting not just of little weaknesses and foibles, but of a positively demonic dynamism. The individual seldom knows anything of this; [...] a raging monster.” Carl Jung, 1912.

Syria's civil war constitutes the worst humanitarian disaster of our time and it is estimated that over four million refugees will have fled the country by the end of this year. These have already had huge impacts on neighboring countries.

The crisis began with anti-government demonstrations in March 2011, part of the Arab Spring. These triggered a violent crackdown by the regime. By July, army defectors had become the Free Syrian Army and were joined by many civilians. Matters are further complicated by divisions between secular and Islamist fighters, and between ethnic groups. Over 190,000 people (half of whom were civilians) have died. Human rights violations are widespread and basics such as food and medical care are sorely lacking.

Over half of the country's pre-war population of 23 million requires urgent humanitarian assistance, whether they still remain in Syria or have escaped from the country. Thousands flee daily after witnessing their neighborhoods bombed or family or friends killed. This course of action is as risky as remaining, with families having to walk many miles at night in order to avoid being killed by snipers or being apprehended by soldiers who kidnap young men to fight for the regime.

The majority of refugees are currently living in Jordan and Lebanon, the region's two smallest countries whose weak infrastructures and limited resources are approaching their breaking points. Iraq and Turkey are also hosting an increasing number of Syrians. More than half of the refugees are children and most have been out of school for months or years.

The World Health Organization has estimated that 35% of the country's hospitals are out of service and in certain regions, up to 70% of health care professionals have fled. Cases of diarrhoea and hepatitis A have doubled since the beginning of the year and routine vaccination has been abandoned, implying that displaced refugees also may pose health risks to the countries to which they have fled.

Furthermore, the lack of clean water and poor sanitation in crowded and makeshift settlements further threatens health by increasing the risk of outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and polio. Exactly one year ago, the United Nations issued its largest ever appeal for a

single crisis, asking for \$6.5 billion.

International humanitarian aid for this tragedy is being coordinated by the United Nations. The United States is providing food aid, medical supplies, emergency and basic health care, shelter materials, clean water and hygiene and education supplies. Islamic Relief has stocked 30 hospitals and sent hundreds of thousands of medical and food parcels. Iran has been exporting between 500 and 800 tons of flour daily to Syria. Malta is only peripherally involved, hosting some refugees and providing other assistance as it can.

It is abundantly clear that medicine's global efforts to reduce morbidity and mortality pale into insignificance when compared with the death and destruction meted out by man on himself in the name of religious fundamental extremism.

Detrimental long term effects by extremism on global population growth are also possible. It is estimated that the global population will perhaps level off around the year 2050-2075, at 9 to 11 billion, perhaps even slowly decline thereafter since education and health care tend to reduce fecundity.

However, extremism tends to reduce women to virtual slavery (as uneducated male chattels in patriarchal societies). A global rise in extremism therefore threatens humanity with Malthusian scenarios, leading to collapsing food supplies and widespread famines. It would therefore behoove developed countries to control extremism in their own long term interests.

Cover Picture:

'Nude'

Charcoal and Watercolour.

By Parascandalo Raymond

Ray Parascandalo is a Consultant Paediatrician and Neonatologist. He started drawing at an early age and later was tutored by Harry Alden and the late Esprit Barthelet at the School of Arts (1973-4). From 2000 to 2008, Dr Parascandalo furthered his studies in drawing and painting under Anton Calleja. Subsequently, in 2009 he joined Patrick Dalli's Art Group. His preferred medium is acrylic but he also works in watercolour, terracotta pencils and charcoal. His favourite style is impressionism. Dr Parascandalo has participated in seventeen collective art exhibitions between 2001 and 2014.