AMAR NEWSLETTER
MARCH 2020

CORONA VIRUS: AMAR'S URGENT APPEAL
SEE PG18
AMAR’s medical professionals and volunteers are heavily involved in the fight to protect some of Iraq’s most disadvantaged people from COVID-19.

Our doctors, nurses and women health volunteers (WHVs) are running awareness campaigns across the country, and our clinics are on high alert and remain vigilant over the threat posed by the virus to their patients.

The death toll and the number of confirmed cases continues to rise daily. The first suspected cases have been reported in northern Iraq, and experts are trying to prevent it from spiralling out of control.

In Basra, the focus has been on promoting health information on the virus through community councils, WHVs and health education in schools’ programmes.

In the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, in Khanke and Essyan IDP camps, where AMAR runs healthcare clinics serving tens of thousands of displaced Yazidis, staff have been quick off the mark.

They were running an awareness campaign as early as February in response to the announcement of the first case in Iraq. The team distributed information leaflets on the virus and ways to prevent its spread among camp residents.
An AMAR nurse also visited kindergarten students in Khanke to teach them about COVID-19. Another large-scale awareness drive was launched on March 15th, spearheaded by AMAR’s 21 WHVs in the camp.

In the clinics themselves, AMAR doctors and nurses continue to treat patients as normal while remaining alert to possible cases. The cold winter months are already a difficult time there, but the healthcare teams are doing all they can to meet the new challenge.

So far there have been no reported cases of COVID-19 among the AMAR patient population. However, all staff remain vigilant. Healthcare and management teams are continuously monitoring the situation to ensure that these vulnerable communities continue to be protected and treated in the most effective way possible during this challenging time.

Dr Khalil Abdul Kareem, the manager of our Public Health Care Centre in Khanke Camp said that his staff would do everything they possibly could to keep camp residents safe.

“We are extremely concerned about our patients, as conditions are so basic here. We are determined to give everyone as much information as we can on the basic measures they can take to stop or at least slow down any spread,” explained Dr Khalil.

He added: “People have been very receptive and totally understand that they must keep a distance from others and to wash their hands as often as possible. My biggest fear of course is how we deal with the situation if people do become infected. Hopefully we can stop this happening.”

See page 18 for details on how you can help.
Throughout 2019, AMAR was sponsored by the British Council to record and preserve Yazidi religious and traditional music. This had enormous other benefits on the morale and mental health of the Yazidis.

As the culmination of this project, in February, AMAR brought a small choir of young women and girls, and several Yazidi religious musicians (Qawals) to London. The young women all came from the IDP camps where AMAR has been helping for the last five years.

The visit started with a recital at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire, in the old Royal Naval Hospital, Greenwich. The Conservatoire is home to AMAR’s music consultant, Professor Michael Bochmann. Our party travelled down the river by boat. The performance was an opportunity for the choir to refine their musical sets.

The group then went to Westminster Abbey. They were given a private tour and attended Evensong.
This was followed by a performance by both the Qawals and choir. Welcomed by the new Dean, The Very Reverend David Hoyle, and hosted by Canon Anthony Ball, the event was attended by AMAR Board members, including The Rt Revd. Dr. Alastair Redfern and Canon Dr. Edmund Newell. The Qawals performed some of their deeply spiritual music in the Abbey Cloisters and entrance to the Chapter House, and the choir performed in the Cellarium Terrace. Members of the Yazidi Spiritual Council and its advisers presented Canon Ball with a traditional Yazidi carpet. Lord Alton, and the historian and author, Tom Holland, attended.

The following day, the choir and Qawals performed at the Weston Wing of the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. This was a core event, as one of the aims of the project was to preserve Yazidi culture by recording and storing the religious (Qawal) and traditional music (choir). The musical archive is now safeguarded for future generations of Yazidis.

The recital was extremely well attended, and the head of the Bodleian Libraries, Bodley’s Librarian, Mr Richard Ovenden, formally received the archive material.

Following this, the Yazidi musicians then gave another recital in the chapel of New College.

The next morning started at the British Council offices in Central London. The Council, through its Cultural Protection Fund, had sponsored AMAR’s project to record and preserve Yazidi music, and to promote it back into the IDP camps. Council staff were suitably appreciative to see the impact which their projects were having on the ground.

For many of our choristers and musicians, the highlight of the tour was the audience with AMAR’s Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales in Clarence House.

The choir was presented to HRH in the Morning Room at Clarence House
In the Music Room, His Royal Highness, accompanied by Baroness Nicholson, senior advisers from the Yazidi Spiritual Council and AMAR Trustees and senior staff members, listened as both the Qawals and then the choir performed a selection of their music. The whole party was then presented, and HRH generously gave of his time to talk to all the visitors, particularly the Yazidis.

That evening, there was a performance at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park. Its Principal and Chief Executive, Canon Newell, invited colleagues and friends to enjoy the music and speak to the Qawals, and musicians. Afterwards, a representative from the BBC Radio 3 world music programme, Music Planet, recorded some of the music and conducted interviews for later broadcast.

Both the choir and the Qawals were given a tour of the Houses of Parliament and then were guests in the Gallery of the House of Lords.

Baroness Nicholson took an active part in the day’s proceedings when questions on freedom of religion and belief, aid distribution as part of International Development, and female genital mutilation (FGM) were put to the Minister of State at the Department for International Development, Baroness Sugg.

Later, the Baroness joined many fellow Peers and senior politicians, clergymen and academics for a reception in the Cholmondeley Room to welcome the Yazidi choir and Qawals. She had wanted to pay tribute to the incredible courage and resilience the Yazidis had faced in such challenging circumstances.

The final event in their busy schedule was at London’s Reform Club where Baroness Nicholson is a member. A suitably interested gathering of Club Members and their guests watched the performances and took time later to meet the Yazidis.
Interest in the Yazidis grew throughout the week, and attracted remarkable media coverage, and put the plight of the Yazidis and the Yazidi women and girls back in the public consciousness. It also became the start of enormous media interest, with articles and news pieces on BBC, ITV, the Voice of America and in The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and Thomson Reuters.
After 27 years of working almost exclusively in the Middle East, AMAR is looking to extend its award-winning model to Africa.

An AMAR team, led by our Chair and Founder, Baroness Nicholson, recently visited Somaliland to look at the country’s medical infrastructure, investigate possible locations, and to meet with high-ranking government officials, medical professionals and academics.

During the mission, the team met the President, Muse Bihi Abdi, and other senior ministers. All were very supportive of the AMAR plans, which would be to initially build, staff and run two Primary Health Care Centres.

Somaliland is a self-declared state that separated from the rest of Somalia after a civil war in the late 1980s. Its government regards itself as the successor to the former British Somaliland Protectorate, and is seeking international recognition.
While greater Somalia has become more lawless and violent, Somaliland remains peaceful and has a democratically elected government.

Baroness Nicholson was joined by AMAR’s Treasurer, Chris Frost, our Iraq Operations Director, Dr Ali Jawad, Rob Cole, the Global Head of Communications, and Ahmed Elmi, a UK-based Somalilander, and Founder and Director of the Hargeisa Library. Ahmed will act as AMAR’s representative on the ground.

The invitation to work in Somaliland came from Mr Elmi’s friend, the Deputy Foreign Minister, HE Libaan Yusuf. He has just been appointed to the position after previously serving as Deputy Health Minister.

Mr Yusuf says Somaliland had huge natural resources: oil, gas, minerals, fish, and had a bright future. For now, though, they need help, particularly in health provision.

The Ministry of Health has a budget of just $10 million. This is for the entire health service. They have more than 200 health centres (including mother and child clinics) and 32 hospitals - including the main one in the country’s Capital, Hargeisa.

They also have 3000 staff to pay. The Somaliland health ministry told the AMAR team that their budget could not possibly cover this, so they were dependent on international organisations and independent NGOs.
The country’s Minister for Health Development, Omer Ali Bade, said AMAR would be most welcome in Somaliland. The Minister said he “loved” that the charity kept its overheads to just 10%. He added: “Unfortunately we often deal with other organisations whose administration costs are 50%!”

President of Somaliland, Muse Bihi Abdi, also praised AMAR when the team met him at the Presidency building in Hargeisa.

Speaking in private later to Baroness Nicholson, President Abdi told her he had always believed the basic building block of health was Primary Health Care. He had wanted Somaliland to adopt this for some time.

The President said he was 100% behind AMAR establishing itself in Somaliland.

Earlier, Baroness Nicholson presented him with a copy of Angus Beaton’s book of AMAR photographs and in return the President gave her a book of Somaliland images.

President Abdi will now take a personal interest in the project and will also bring in the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Investment to join the Minister of Health and Minister of Education to help facilitate AMAR projects. AMAR is now officially registered as a charity. Initial planning by senior management is focusing on the construction of two PHCCs.
An ICU Nurse treating a child at MAS Hospital in Hargeisa
Twins in an incubator in MAS Hospital Hargeisa

Dr Ali Jewad and MAS Hospital’s Dr Ibrahim.

The Somaliland President with Baroness Nicholson and Dep Foreign Minister, Libaan Yusuf.
AMAR’s Chairman, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne and our Treasurer, Chris Frost, travelled to Utah to meet members of our newly formed friends’ group and to attend its inaugural Board meeting.

They also met some of AMAR’s most generous donors, attended the world premiere of a feature film being screened at the famous Sundance Festival, and the Baroness was presented with an award for her humanitarian leadership.

Led by prominent Utahan, Stanley Parrish, the Utah Friends of AMAR has only recently been formed but has already raised enough funds to present the visiting AMAR duo from London with a substantial donation.

As a part of the Sundance Film Festival, the Baroness and Chris watched The Glorias, a film based on the life of the journalist, feminist and political activist, Gloria Steinem, which was directed by Julie Taymor. Julie also wrote the screenplay together with Sarah Ruhl.
At the festival’s Women’s Leadership Celebration, our Chairman was recognised for her humanitarian leadership and her work for the AMAR Foundation.

The mission also included dinner with leading figures from Utah and The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints.

Hosted by Brigham Young University’s Rex E Lee Chair and Professor of Law, Brett Scharffs and his wife, Deirdre, the guests included; Elder Jeffrey Holland and his wife, Sister Patricia Holland, David Kirkham, Boyce and Sandra Fitzgerald, Cole and Louise Durham, Jim Olson, Sister Sharon Eubank, Elder David Bednar and his wife, Sister Susan Bednar, and Paul and Ruth Kerry.

BYU’s International Center for Law and Religion Studies - whose Director is Mr Scharffs - will co-sponsor the next round of AMAR’s Windsor Conference series which leads on combatting religious discrimination.

A final event of the AMAR mission was to meet some of our generous donors and supporters in Utah: Mrs Barbara Barrington Jones, Mrs Karen Ashton, Kathleen Sorensen, and UFOA Board members, Sharlene Hawkes and Louise Brown.
AMAR ROMANIA ROUNDS OFF ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

At the beginning of December, AMAR’s digital communications officer, Isabella Librando, visited our schools projects in Romania and attended a very special Christmas dance recital.

AMAR’s Community Action programme in Romania brings disabled and non-disabled students together to perform and take part in a series of dance and cultural events throughout the year.

At the Christmas event students performed several folk songs and dances together. Students from Spain and Belgium also took part as part of a European Erasmus programme bringing children with disabilities together throughout Europe. The Erasmus students were accompanied by their teachers, who were very interested to learn more about the success of Community Action in integrating disabled students and their peers.

Watching the event, Isabella was struck by how much the performances and preparation meant to the children and their parents. Even after the recital was over, all the children continued to dance with joy from the excitement of the day.

During the trip, Isabella was also able to speak to a student on AMAR’s programme, Sara. Sara has been with the programme for five years. Over that time, her grandmother and teachers have noticed a big difference in her. Sara is now is a leader for all the new students who join her school. She has gone from not being able to speak to forging meaningful bonds with her teachers, principal and fellow students.

Diana Tascu, Sara with her teachers and grandmother and Isabella
Sara’s development is testament to the impact AMAR’s Community Action programme is having on the lives of disabled children in Romania.

Sara with her school Principal

Young boy taking part in dance festival

Visually impaired children performing folk dance
COVID-19 is spreading rapidly across the world. Governments of even the wealthiest countries are struggling to cope with the scale of the Pandemic.

For Iraq this is nothing short of disaster. Iraq’s health care system is in almost permanent crisis, constantly on the brink of collapse.

Only days ago, its Health Minister, Jafar Allawi, was seen on television pleading to Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, the spiritual leader of Iraq’s Shia Muslims, for help. His government had failed to agree to Allawi’s plea for emergency funding to cope with the Corona crisis.

Iraq is a country devastated by decades of war, internecine conflict, dictatorship, corruption and poverty, and now its beleaguered staff and broken infrastructure is being asked to deal with one of the most virulent viruses the world has ever known.

The hundreds of thousands of Yazidi IDPs living in the sprawling camps in the north are particularly at risk. AMAR field teams are doing all they can to limit the spread by dispensing much needed advice and support to those most in need.
For the last 27 years, AMAR has been at the forefront of efforts to support and enhance the Iraqi health care system. We have built, refurbished and run more than 75 health care centres, our medical professionals have carried out almost 11 million consultations, and our teams have been caring for and supporting hundreds of thousands of Yazidi IDPs since the ISIS invasion of 2014.

To continue to do this we need your support. Without our amazing donors we could not have achieved so much for more than a quarter of a century.

Today, with COVID-19 the very latest threat to the lives and livelihoods of the poor Iraqi people, we need your help more than ever.

We are delighted to add that the appeal is being backed by the Joss Stone Foundation (@JossStone) which aims to raise awareness and support for more than 200 charities globally. Thank you so much Joss!

ALL THE WAYS YOU CAN DONATE

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* I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount the charity will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that VAT and Council tax do not qualify.
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