



Worse than Moria

Omid Alizada is a 30-year-old pharmacist from Afghanistan. He has been living on Lesbos since November 2019. Since March, he has been an active part of the *Moria Corona Awareness Team*, a self-organization of refugees founded in order to prevent the spreading of COVID-19 inside camp Moria. In the interview, he speaks about their activities and gives an update on the situation of refugees on Lesbos. An interview by Agnes Andrae, Hedwig Fuß, and Caroline Mulert.

You are the coordinator of *Moria Corona Awareness Team*. Can you describe the activities of this team in Moria?

We founded this team in the middle of March, with the outbreak of the Corona virus on the island. Our most important activity has been to raise awareness about the Corona virus inside the camp. But we have also organized waste management, first aid courses for the refugees and right now we are managing a recycling project.

Most of the people who lived in Moria have been transferred to a new camp called Kara Tepe. How is the social and humanitarian situation there?

In some respects, this camp is better than Moria, but there are a lot of other aspects that are really worse. For example, the security is a little better: It's a secure camp, it's a closed camp, there is lots of police inside and outside the camp. The police have patrols day and night, they prevent fights between people. They prevent violence. From this point of view, it's a big change and that's good. But on the other side, living conditions are really worse than in Moria. People live in tents, in shared tents; there is one tent for two families. There is no running water and there are no washing stations. Food distribution doesn't work well and there is not enough medical service for the people. The worst thing is that up to now, two months after people were moved to this camp, there is no shower inside the camp.

The Kara Tepe is a military compound. Is there any access for aid organizations?

Yes, it was a military area. It was a shooting area for the army. The situation was really difficult at the

time when people left Moria: The refugees had to live on the streets in really bad conditions. They couldn't go to the city and there was no chance for them to go back to Moria. So, they really quickly decided to choose this military place to make it a new temporary camp for refugees. But yes, there are some NGOs, two or three medical NGOs. Up to two days ago, they didn't have a night shift, but fortunately now they also offer medical service at night. However, they can only give very basic medical service to the people. Some diseases cannot be treated. There is a lack of medicine, a lack of staff, things like that.

Do the refugees of the camp also have the chance to get legal advice by an attorney or are there only medical NGOs inside there at the moment?

There are only medical NGOs. The legal situation for the refugees is not good, because they don't have a place where they can ask for help or assistance. It is a really hard situation.

Do you have an active *Corona Awareness Team* there right now?

Yes. The *Moria Corona Awareness Team* is doing activities to raise awareness inside the camp, like distributing masks, distributing hygiene products, advising people about the nature of the corona virus, advising them about the benefit of quarantine if you have the symptoms of the virus. There are also very few other organizations that are doing some basic awareness activities, to educate the people and to teach them how to follow the Corona measures.

How many people are in Kara Tepe now?

Right now, there are 7,300 people. I got the exact number yesterday.

What kind of options do you have at the moment to restrict the spreading of COVID-19 in the camp?

The only option that we have right now is to isolate the infected people, to wear masks inside the camp, to stick to social distancing as much as possible – which is really really impossible right now. These are the options we have to keep the camp secure and to prevent the virus of spreading. But a big challenge which everyone is facing right now is the bad sanitary situation. Still, people don't really have access to a place where they can wash and clean themselves. However, they try really hard; they stay for hours in the long lines to reach the water. But unfortunately, water is really limited. In the conditions we live in, in a spot where people live really close to each other, not having good sanitation means that it is really hard to keep the virus from spreading.

Have refugees been building their own self-organizations in the new camp?

Yes. Very slowly people are starting to understand that we will have to stay in this camp for a long time, maybe for years, while our asylum applications are being processed. So, on the one hand, a lot of people have developed mental conditions: Being jobless, not doing anything, just sleeping and eating, makes people sick. On the other hand, some people have really understood that this place is the place where we have to live now, this is our environment, and we have responsibilities. We have to keep the camp clean, we have to assist others with their injuries,

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we can advise people, we have to educate our children, at least keep ourselves busy. So very slowly we find these kinds of activities that make sense inside the camp.

What do you think will be the next steps of the Greek government regarding refugees in the camps on Lesbos?

The people inside the camp who have already received a positive asylum application result have been transferred from here to the mainland. So, around 3.500 people have been moved. But the rest of the people who are staying in the new camp right now, they are people who have not been accepted yet. Some have already passed their asylum interview, but they are still here inside the camp, waiting for the result. They don't know about their futures and they don't know which decision the asylum office took for them. They don't know anything. So, they are still waiting.

What are you demanding from the Greek government?

A very urgent demand of all refugees is to receive the result of their interviews, to be moved from here to a better place with humane living conditions, any place that is a little better than the camp. Living in the camp with these conditions puts a lot of pressure on the people. So, their first priority is that the Greek government processes their asylum applications fast. But while they are waiting in these bad living conditions, they need assistance and help so that they can survive in this camp. Winter is coming and the camp is placed right next to the water; there are some tents that are only five or six metres away from the sea. So, the place is really vulnerable and they urgently need lots of assistance.

Do you also have demands on the European Union?

All refugees demand from the EU is to stop these games. Instead of

keeping refugees locked in a country that is not in a good economic condition to support refugees, let them have good lives, the opportunity to study, these kinds of things. Everyone is wishing, hoping that the European community distributes these refugees among other countries that need them. In Germany, lots of states are asking for refugees. Among these refugees, there are lots of people who are skilled and well educated, but because they are a refugee and because they don't have the asylum status, they are not allowed to work, they are not allowed to have an income, they are not allowed to study. If they get an opportunity, they can stand on their own feet, they can be helpful for the society and for their families. So, we're asking really respectfully from all European communities to help these people and to place them in good living conditions. They will fend for themselves.<



Foto: Omid Alizada