

A LIFE DEVOTED TO HUMANITY

Muzaffer Baca is one of the founders of IBC (International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation) a Turkish NGO, operating worldwide to respond to the needs of humanity. Recently it has very much focused on the Syrian and Ukrainian Crises. The purpose of this interview is to know something more about the feelings that prompted him and his organization for such a tough humanitarian task.

1. Where did your journey to humanitarian relief work begin after years of journalism? Can you briefly talk about this story? Where and how did you first meet with civil society activities and humanitarian relief projects?

As International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC), we work with the aim of producing appropriate and effective humanitarian solutions for the most challenging regions of a rapidly changing world. We have developed hundreds of impartial and independent projects aimed at improving human life as well as meeting vital needs all over the world without any discrimination. Our common responsibilities and most important work motivation come from wanting to help those deprived of their right to live.

2. Coming to the present, can you briefly talk about the projects that IBC has developed in Turkey and abroad in the last 5 years?

To summarize briefly, we have been providing emergency aid, health, education, rehabilitation, protection and social cohesion support at local, national, and international levels in the last 5 years. In all the projects we have been developing around the world, we have been collaborating with local and national authorities, other NGOs, global donors, universities and research centers by incorporating their resources, technical expertise and

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experience into our own way of working. The projects we develop make a difference in integration into society, social cohesion, psychosocial support, access to education, access to health services, social development, women's empowerment, gender equality and sustainable livelihoods within the framework of fundamental rights and needs.

3. IBC expanded its work on refugees, especially after the Syrian crisis in 2011. Turkey is in a very strategic situation in this regard, especially at the moment. However, refugees are currently the main and hottest agenda item not only in Turkey but also in the whole world. Can you tell us about the projects that IBC has developed for refugees both in Turkey and around the world?

With the addition of the Ukraine war to the wars and conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and other African countries, this year the plight of refugees began to be felt even more than in the past. As IBC, we meet the urgent needs of refugees and displaced migrants, which we refer to as IDP, both in Turkey and in all the other countries experiencing this crisis. We also carry out education, health, protection and social cohesion activities so that refugees are not deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms. We have been in the hot zone since the first day of the Syrian crisis. At the same time, we established support centers for refugees coming to the Turkish border and carried out studies to ensure that they can be integrated into society in a healthy way. Currently, these centers in Istanbul, Kilis, Konya and Şanlıurfa provide services not only to Syrians but also to people of many different nationalities such as Afghan, African and Uyghur Turks. In addition, we continue to meet basic humanitarian needs and provide emergency aid in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Afghanistan, and as of this year, in Ukraine and Moldova.

4. What will Turkey and the world face in this regard in the coming days? Could you share this question with us both as a journalist and as a humanitarian Relief Projects Manager?

Turkey is in a critical position as a country placed in the middle of all crises: the Syrian, the Ukrainian and the Iranian. Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus are areas like a powder cake and Pandora's box. Turkey is hosting around 8 millions refugees and facing critical economic problems that foster social instability as security threats.

5. In 2022, humanitarian relief work shifted and focused on Europe.
–What are your assessments of the Ukraine-Russia war?

As I forecasted at the beginning of the War Russia's invasion to Ukraine is a global threat, especially to Europe and Turkey. In addition, I don't believe that the war is going to end in short term. Because no one of the sides can surrender - either NATO/Ukraine axis or Russia. The war created a new Ukrainian nation so in the future the war is likely to affect the entire Russian Federation which is composed by many different ethnic groups.

6. Can you provide us with updated info about the relief and support projects that IBC has initiated for Ukraine?

Millions of Ukrainian refugees fled for safety to Europe through Moldova, Poland and Romania. The ones with financial capacity managed to go on westwards but thousands of Ukrainians, mainly women and children, are accommodated in Moldova. They are from the poorest communities of Ukraine and don't have any means to go further. They are in deep need of humanitarian assistance, protection and support. IBC has been operating in Moldova and Ukraine since the beginning of the crisis. IBC has reached more than 5000 people with protection services, food, water, medication, shelter materials and other life-critical items. IBC projects in Ukraine and Moldova include medical equipment, food, a mobile bakery with a capacity of 2000 loaves per day, a winterization campaign. On December 2022, IBC launched a reception center in Mykolayiv to meet the needs of IDPs from the war zone and all those affected by the conflict. The people of the war-torn region will be able to charge their phones, connect to the internet for free, get warm and find tea, coffee, soup and ready meals in

this reception center. IBC built a Health Center as well, which will be operational in the Bolgrad region of Odesa, the first of the 6 planned health centers, the other 5 to be built in Mykolayiv in the war-affected areas. The centers, which are planned to be completed by the end of the year, will be integrated into the Ukrainian health system and will work in coordination with local governments. The medical needs of the center, which will be delivered with health center furniture and all medical supplies, will continue to be met after it is put into service.

7. As the manager of an international humanitarian relief organization, you are located in different areas. What do you pay particular attention to in your working standards?

Our working standards are determined by internationally accepted basic humanitarian relief standards. Our motto “We created millions of smiling faces with hundreds of projects” constitutes our mission as well. However, when we look at it from the broadest perspective, we work to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and develop all our projects in accordance with the standards applied to achieve these goals. We carry out all our activities with the principle of independence and impartiality. In this context, before we start activities in the geographies we work in, we conduct extensive field research and analyses in order to understand the region, climate, geography and people of that region. In particular, our team has a deep knowledge of the region and takes action after completing the analysis for the needs of that region. We have a risk management policy and a security policy for all possible risks. In short, IBC displays all its basic principles and values in all its activities without any discrimination. In addition, it plans and analyzes the needs and risks that will arise according to the conditions of the region in which it will work, and in this frame starts its support activities.

8. What awaits the world in 2023? What is IBC’s target for 2023 and where will we see its work? Could you briefly talk about your 2023 plans?

In 2023, we will expand our work in Ukraine and Moldova. At the same time, we will continue to work on accessing the basic needs of Afghanistan, Yemen and Sahel Africa. In Turkey, the community centers we have established for the integration of refugees into society and their access to their fundamental rights will continue to operate. In addition, social cohesion activities, language courses for the host society and refugees and children's caravans, which we have put into operation especially for the children to grow up in a peace-based social order, will continue to work in 2023.