



THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE ON EARTH

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Somalia, a country synonymous with piracy, kidnappings, terrorism and the ongoing plight of people suffering daily of hunger and the constant need of humanitarian aid. It seems as if Somalis have the 'deck of cards' stacked against them, and for the most part, the international community has turned its back on its plight with humanitarian aid becoming less and less over the past couple of years.

One thing is for sure, nothing about Mogadishu is what we would call "normal". Most buildings bear marks of war with destroyed infrastructure and clearly visible bullet holes in walls. Collapsed buildings are a common sight. It's no surprise that Somalia is rated as one of the most dangerous places on earth. How did it get to this?

A Short Journey back in time:

The Supreme Revolutionary Council seized power in 1969 and established the Somali Democratic Republic. Led by Mohamed Siad Barre, this government later collapsed in 1991 as the Somali Civil War broke out. Various armed factions began competing for influence in the power vacuum, particularly in the south. During this period, due to the absence of a central government, Somalia was a "failed state", and residents returned to customary and religious law in most regions. Most recently, a new Federal government was formed that's in its infancy stages with a constant threat of terrorism by the Al-Qaeda-linked group known as Al-Shabaab.

So, think about it for a moment, if you have lived in a state of war for more than 20 years, your 'normal' is very different to what we would deem 'normal'. I remember one of our team members asking one of the youngsters (16 years old) who was at the compound where we stayed, what his dreams were, and whether he was thinking of going to university. You could see by the look of complete confusion on this young man's face that the thought had not even occurred to him. For us growing up in South Africa, we are confronted with these questions from an early age, and yet in Somalia, the questions and context differ completely. Those living in these conditions have their mindsets focused on the "here and now", with tomorrow holding no guarantees, and to make matters worse – an ongoing drought that is deemed as

the most severe in living memory. Aid agencies believe more than 6 million people in Somalia need assistance, of whom about half are threatened with famine. Two years have gone by without rain. Cattle are dead, wells dry and fields empty. So what did we do?

Humanitarian aid organizations are responding as much as they can, and at this juncture, CityHope Disaster Relief was able to send 10 tonnes of food aid to Somalia to assist families in IDP camps on the outskirts of Mogadishu after being approached to respond in May this year. Through the generosity and partnership with CBN Africa and the Futurelife Foundation, the food was sent up, followed by a team of 4 to assist in distribution and logistical efforts.

Like our previous response in this region, we partnered with an organization on the ground who facilitated the distribution, but had unforeseen delays with the internet line being severed recently (cutting off Somalia from the rest of the world) and a newly established government – all causing massive delays in the aid reaching the beneficiaries. We were able to visit an IDP camp where some of the aid was being distributed, as well as assist with going to the Minister of Finance's office to get more paperwork. Due to having more time available, we were able to really engage in discussions around future work in Somalia – which was really exciting, and I am personally looking forward to what's to come. Often times we forget the hope it brings in just "pitching up" in a place like Somalia. Every time one comes back and "arrives", it brings hope, and hope is often the very thing that sustains people suffering from immense hardships.