

Sunday, 10.04.2016

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30 years  
medical doctor

Field report from moria detention camp, Lesvos, Greece  
or

A dirty deal

12:00

From the outside, Moria Camp stands on top of a hill as a strong and threatening fortress. Enclosed within two rows of barbed wire standing atop chain-link fences, lies a network of countless tents, squashed together like a container city ready to burst.

One can always find a string of cars on the roadside surrounding the site, each plastered with either the logo of an NGO, the police, or indeed the military.

Conspicuous by the entrance, four food vendors sell what are arguably Greece's most expensive cans of Coke. After introducing myself as a volunteer doctor from Germany - and not a member of the local police - the price dramatically falls to a reasonable one Euro per can.

I make my first attempt at bypassing the security on the front gate with my gaze firmly set upon my phone screen, ultimately failing at the hands of an unfriendly policeman. The policeman's zealous adherence to his job is not to be swayed by my argument that, as a doctor, I am bound by duty to offer my services to those within the detention camp.

At the first mention of my profession, a refugee approaches and asks me to help a sick patient within the camp. To my utter astonishment, the policeman waves him back into the distant city of tents.

If he is not going to grant me access in a situation like this, he says, then why don't I just go to the Ministry and ask them for permission? Otherwise, I should just leave.

A couple of cigarettes later, I am still standing there when suddenly I spot two young men throwing on their NGO vests opposite the entrance. I amble up to them and explain my situation - who I am and what I plan to do - and before I know what is happening, I am returning to the entrance in a vest bearing the logo of a European organisation (the name of which, I will not disclose) and gleefully handing the policeman my passport. After some brief resistance from the policeman, I finally reach the city of tents, the squalid heart of Moria detention camp.

Moria is tight, dirty, and malodorous. Despite being greeted by countless smiling faces, I cannot help but sense the despair within my first few steps. I befriend some volunteers who organise food distribution within the camp as the government-run catering operation is woefully insufficient. Whilst grim-looking government officials distribute meagre food rations mainly consisting of water, noodles, and egg, we prepare much larger rations, financed by donations and prepared by volunteers. The government supposedly provides 800 portions but from what I have seen, I would suggest that it is far less. Meanwhile, the NGO portions provide a meal of rice, sauce, and water for approximately one thousand people, as well as food for babies.

In my eyes, no one leaves the queue sufficiently fed. After all the food has been distributed, many people still wait there - either because they have yet to receive anything or are still in need of more.

My new friends estimate that there are 3000 people imprisoned within Moria. In the last couple of days, many have been moved to Kara Tepe, one of the other camps on the island where the situation is a bit more relaxed. Whilst refugees can use family support areas there and walk outside to the

nearby supermarket, inside Moria, leisure facilities are virtually non-existent.

In the midst of a crowd, I distribute water whilst trying my best to spot any potential medical cases. People limp and shuffle past me but for the most part, a thumbs-up has to suffice as a check-up.

The first actual patient that I tend to is clearly suffering from a fever. I take out my stethoscope and with the help of a translator, diagnose the most obvious pneumonia of my short medical career. Another febrile man approaches, complaining of a sore throat. His neck is inflamed with red sores. I ask them to go together to the medical tent - clearly marked with a red cross - where they can both receive some treatment.

I then find two boys of around 6 and 8 years old, each displaying more severe signs of fever, green and yellow expectoration and persistent coughing; they are also plagued with pain and a constant feeling of being weak. I decide to take them personally to the ambulance and on my way, bump into my first two patients in front of a closed Red Cross tent.

Closed. Just like the food distribution tent I just left. All the portions have been handed out.

I ask them all to stay here whilst I find medical support but begin to fear that I won't be able to track down any Antibiotics. During my search, I come across many more people who require medical attention. I clean and bandage wounds, some of which have been infected for a while now. No one seems to be able to show me a working hospital, clinic, or doctor's tent. After 4 hours, I am still unsure as to where they might be. People keep referring me to the different organisations that supposedly supply medical aid and supplies in the camp but I have knocked on countless closed doors all in vain.

As I return to the first patients I saw, they had disappeared. What should they have waited for... Again and again I speak to people with coughs and those I deem to have fever. As soon as I bring out my stethoscope, the people around me multiply all seeking medical consultation. All around me people complain about coughs and fever; over throat and tooth pain; over stool problems, diarrhoea and stomach pain. Despair arises in me. What is the point of all my diagnosing and the taxing translated medical consultations, when no kind of check ups or therapy will come of them. Even if I could get hold of medicine or even a doctor here, the inadequate food and water makes a full recovery even more unlikely. There aren't enough showers or toilets and nothing resembling private space, The only available shade is in tents in which the air stands still and flickers in the heat. Soon I will have asked everyone where the infirmary is, and there where it is supposedly located, sick people sit in front of a closed door.

It's 18:00. I am dizzy and thirsty. The only water I had, I gave to the young mother with a newborn on her arm. She had been waiting in the line for a while, only to have the food distribution shut down in front of her. Over most of the water taps stand prohibited signs and I surely won't drink from those from which I haven't been warned away from. The children overly enjoyed my granola bars, more than that I think should be reasonable.

I almost feel ashamed of this, but I have to get out of here. I wish I could hide every single one of them under my borrowed vest and smuggle them out of this unbearable place so that I could personally spend them one of these overpriced Cokes, after which I have been longing to consume for hours. Its unbelievable that this out there is supposed to be Europe.