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"We are still humans, we are no animals!"

Conversation with Yusuf, a young Syrian, who has been, together with his family, stuck on the Greek island of Samos for almost 1,5 years, still waiting for their documents.

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I have been here for almost one year and a half. My family has arrived with me. We are a six person family, still living here waiting for our documents to get ready. Already before we didn't have any access to healthcare or anything like that. And by the beginning of Corona and the first cases appearing in Greece, we couldn't enter any hospital, we couldn't go to any official hospital. We are just allowed to the medical centres of the NGOs around us on the island.

And one more thing: At the start of Corona, the police started to not allow us to get out of the camp. They allow about one hundred person per day. One hundred person of eight thousand person! They are just allowing one hundred person to get out to the town to buy food and other things. But other people will have to stay and wait for another day to try to get out. And they may succeed or not. Every morning, they distribute about one hundred paper in the police station in the camp. So if you want to get out of the camp you have to wake up so early and go to the police station and wait in a huge line and you may get a paper



or you may not. Like the paper they give is just for two hours. When someone wants to buy something and he doesn't have a paper, he gives money to his friends, or gives the cash card to his friends so one of his friends, who has a paper to get out of the camp, that friend can buy for him something.

Right now, they put for us a new rule, that we can go out of the camp by 7 o'clock in the morning, and we have to return to the camp by 7 o'clock in the night. It is a new rule that they started to work with yesterday. Everyone can go out again but they must not stay out for a long time. If the police sees you in the middle of the night without doing anything, they can give you a fine of 150€. Our salaries that we are taking [money that is given to people in the camp by UNHCR] is just 90€ per adult, 50 € for the children, for minors. So it was a disaster.

And for the food line in the camp: At the first day we hear that we have to stay in home, and that we should not get in touch with any other people. We hear that also. If we stay inside, we have to stay two meters far from each other. But that didn't happen here in the camp. They started to distribute the food, and have a food line, because we are not allowed to go out of the camp, so there were many people staying in the line. The situation was terrible. I thank my God that Corona virus didn't arrive at Samos, because if it was, I believe that all the people here on the island would be infected by it.

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We came here as asylum seekers, you understand. We came here seeking for safety. We didn't know that the situation will be this bad as it is right now, you understand. If we really knew that before, we wouldn't come, we wouldn't try to come even here. We would stay under the bombs, we would stay facing the war in our countries and not coming here, you understand. We are just asking the governments here to give us a small part of our rights. We are still humans, we are no animals! Because they are treating us much more bad than animals.

Some people ask us: „Why you didn't stay in Turkey? It's an Islamic country, it's a good country for you. They will be human to you“. But something that the people don't understand: that Turkey accepted people in 2011, 2012. And after that they closed the door. The people that didn't enter in 2011 and 2012 and entered after that, they couldn't stay in Turkey. They are illegal there, without any documents and if they get arrested in Turkey they will be deported to Syria or to their country. That thing happened with me about two times. It happened to me in 2012 and it happened to me in 2017. We passed to Turkey in 2019. We couldn't stay in Turkey because we already knew that if they arrest us in Turkey they will send us back again to Syria - without any humanity, without any caring about what will happen to us if they send us there. So they deported many people and if you watch the news, you can know that something like that is happening. And the people who will be deported to Syria they cannot return again and be illegal again in Turkey!

Greece is much better than Turkey and we say that there is still some humanity, even if it's so less. We are in a better situation than other people. We have access to water, even if it's so little. We have access to electricity, we go inside the camp to charge our phones, to charge our lights, to light up in the nights in our tent. When we go to shower, we go inside the camp to have a shower. And there is so little access to the shower, or to the toilets. So we stay in a line. Everywhere we stay in the line. Everywhere. For the toilet, for the bathrooms, showers, for the food. For everything. A lot of time that passes. And also in the food line, we have to stay more than two hours, just to take our food from the food line.

And you know, there are many newborn kids here inside the camp, who stay inside the tents, without any access to healthcare, without anything that you can mention. Today, I saw a kid that is just two months old. And he has a skin problem because of the bedbugs, because of the heat. And the kid was all the time crying. I talked to his father: „Take him to the hospital“. He talked to me: "they don't allow us to enter the hospital." If we don't have paper, if it's not something with corona virus, they don't allow us to enter the hospital, or if it's not something that is so serious, they tell you: „Go away, go to MSF, go to Med Equality.“ And they are trying to do their best, but they don't have all the stuff that they need to helping the people. And they are a few people compared to the people who are staying in the camp.

The interview was conducted by Ferdinand Moeck.

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