



"Quality Medical Services and Equipment for All"

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Mr. Ismail Ahmed Mohamed
Board of Relief and Humanitarian Affairs
Dohuk, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Dear Mr. Ismail:

As BRHA identified in their plan for the past year, the care of Yezidi women and girls (and their children) who have escaped or been liberated from ISIS is a high priority. While some of these victims decide to locate abroad, others choose to stay in the Kurdistan Region. Most are able to live with their families, but some have lost their husbands and other family members, and either have no place to stay, or are interested in living in a residential facility that offers employment training, income generation, mental health services and other opportunities.

There is a paucity of residential facilities filling such needs in the Kurdistan Region. Recognizing this, MedEast Organization, an Iraqi NGO that has been working in the area for several years, primarily with Yezidi IDPs, determined to build and operate a home where such needs could be met. Work began on the building in November 2014 as 7,000 Yezidis from Sinjar settled into 240 unfinished houses in Seje Village, Semel District. Now the structure is nearly complete.

MedEast presents this plan of operation to BRHA for their consideration internally and with their component directorates within the KRG's Dohuk Provincial Government. Our goal is to receive approval for operation to work in a collaborative process that assures the best possible services are refined and applied to the needs.

The model is that of a home setting rather than an institution. The home, to be called Gula Nissani, has been designed to offer comfort, healing, strengthening, skill building, and new directions for the lives of the residents. Participants will communally care for themselves and their needs, from cooking and cleaning to operations and program planning within a range of supports from professionals.

The facility has a primary building with 2 wings. The primary building has a second storey with a 12 by 18 meter living area including 7 individual bedrooms, 7 bathrooms, large living area, and a large dining area. This opens on one side to a large kitchen and visitor's dining area, outdoor patio, and office. This area is suitable for housing 28 women/girls including any dependent children. Below this living area is a 9 x 18 meter sewing factory where the residents will produce items to sell in local and international markets. On the other side, the second floor housing area opens into a breezeway that leads to



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terraced gardens with a waterfall and 3 ponds above on the side of the mountain, with extensive outdoor seating areas built from natural rock into the mountain. On the same level, it opens into another 2-storey wing with 6 training rooms, 2 staff bedrooms, conference room, staff kitchen, pantry library, and 3 bathrooms. The rear of the facility has a large vegetable garden and 6 fish ponds, producing fresh vegetables and protein for residents' use. The building is served by both national power and a large 12 KVA generator.

As Director of MedEast I am primarily responsible for the program and facility. I hold a PhD in Community Health and a Masters in Public health from the U.S. I have been a tenured full professor at the University of Hawaii, and also served as Associate Dean for Research in that setting. I also have hospital work experience, training in Health Psychology, and have fostered young adults from troubled homes in several countries.

Our manager is Anette Axelsohn, from Sweden, who holds a degree in nursing. She managed a very large staff for 15 years, working with refugees from the Middle East who had settled in Upsalla, Sweden, offering a wide range of social services in both home and institutional settings. She has a remarkable talent for counselling women. She has been serving as the Director of the Gula Nissani Safe Home during the past 6 months, planning services and counseling Yezidi girls and women returning from ISIS. She has overseen a small pilot project with 5 young Yezidi women.

Ms. Anette is aided by a network of Physicians, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Counselors and Social Workers from Europe, America and other developed nations, some of whom will live in the Safe Home long term while others will visit periodically on rotation. Mental health services and social services will be the strength of the program, with consistency of care and long-term follow-up.

Referrals to the program can be made by members of the government and of the community. Several women have already heard of the program and have travelled to see the site and interview with the staff. We expect to gradually increase the number of residents to the targeted maximum of 28 through these mechanisms.

Each young woman is screened initially to ascertain her needs. Those who are accepted into the program may be in residence or travelling daily to the site from their homes to work in the sewing program. Those working will receive a monthly stipend of approximately 300,000 IQD for their work after completing a one-month training program, if their skills meet performance standards. Those living in the home will receive free housing, meals and services and participate in the food bank, soup kitchen, and educational programs for their own benefit and the benefit of widows and orphans in Seje village. Commitments of 6 months will be made to young women for residential housing and labor. Non-



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resident workers will be retained based on their performance in training and in their daily work. The goal is to make the project self-sustaining over time, through the products made on-site.

Funding for the project comes from international sources like World Compassion, China Care International, and others. The funders have paid for the building, and will pay for stipends in advance to assure stability for the young women receiving them.

Opportunities will be available for coordination with KRG Directorates for ongoing and short-term services and programs to be offered on-site. The location will serve as a retreat for women who have been victimized, and leading women internationally and locally will come to share with them and to learn from them.

The initial 5-year plan includes an expectation to deliver services to as many as 150 young women and dependent young children. The Sewing, English, Computing and other curricula will be taught by topic area specialists, both local and international, most of whom are volunteers. The staff will be small by design, to allow the women living in the home to plan and execute programs for their own benefit and the benefit of local widows and orphans.

Further details will be developed by the women themselves, in collaboration with KRG authorities, over time. Meanwhile, a pilot project has involved interviewing many young women who have come from ISIS, offering complete confidentiality, learning of their needs and dreams for the future. This has helped us to gain a greater understanding of the diverse situations presented by these women/girls and to know how to handle a variety of difficult situations. The women involved for several months already in the small pilot sewing project (non-residential) will serve as leaders to the newcomers.

Respect for the Yezidi culture and the privacy of the women has been proven in the Gula Nissani Safe Home, and fidelity to high standards will be the hallmark of all work performed in the programs as the project moves forward.

We respectfully request approval to begin the project by December 1, as the need is timely, and Yezidi women are already waiting for an opportunity to participate in both residential and non-residential programs.

Sincerely,

Paul M. Kingery, Director