

## **Libyan Expats Mobilise to Help Refugees**

**Author:** [IWPR contributor](#)

Activist visits southern Tunisia to find out how best to help those displaced by the conflict.

When the conflict in Libya started I was among a group of people who set up the World Medical Camp for Libya, WMCL. There are now about 40 of us working on this – bankers, doctors, professionals who have no experience of aid work but saw a need for humanitarian aid while the war was raging. We've managed to raise about 486,000 dollars so far and sent goods to the value of about four million dollars to the region. Also, we organise groups of us to go out to the Tunisian and Egyptian border with Libya, as well as to Malta, to facilitate the delivery of aid and to find out what needs are there.

My recent trip was to see what was happening with Libyan refugees in the south of Tunisia, because there was little information on the conditions there. We visited three camps; the first was a small one in the town of Tatawin, where about 300 refugees had basically been given a youth centre by the local community to shelter in. It was quite a desperate situation because they weren't being looked after by any charity or NGO. Different aid groups had passed through but there was no one dedicated to care for them. So they had organised themselves as best as possible – for instance, one doctor among the refugees had, as the best-educated man there, begun to take charge and organise them as a group.

The second camp was in Ramada and was organised by the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR. The way this agency operates is to provide basic materials and equipment but to contract with implementing partners, usually local NGOs or charities, to actually run the camp. Here as many as 3,000 people were living in tents. When these refugees left Libya, particularly from the western mountains, the weather was cold and they pretty much arrived with what they were wearing. But now in south Tunisia it is getting hotter and hotter and they told us that they needed different clothing.

From there we moved on to the town of Dhiba right on the border. There were around 2,500 people here in a camp run entirely by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent. And this in my opinion was as good as a refugee camp can be. The tents were bigger, the conditions were better and the place was well-organised. The Emiratis have kept the other NGOs outside the camp gates which mean people go just outside to access services and the procedure is very organised. There, there were very few extra requirements except for some summer clothes for women and children. The refugees were very complimentary about their treatment and conditions.

Now we are working on a strategy for how we can best help. Our ideas include setting up a feeding centre in Tatawin for newly-arrived refugees, and we're talking to a hotel owner in the southern Tunisian town of Djerba about taking over his 400-bed hotel as a base for refugees. We're also arranging shipments of clothing.

This is all new to me, but I am simply using as much common sense as possible. Right now, I am working 20-hour days, leaving my day job and going home to organise these aid supplies. But my whole family is still in Tripoli, and Libya is my home and country. I have always dreamt that some day we would be able to get rid of the brutal rule of the Gaddafi regime.

**The writer is a 35-year-old, Tripoli-born banker who has lived in London for the last 19 years.**

**Location:** [Libya](#)

**Topic:** [Regime](#)

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