

Far from home, but not alone

During last summer's war between Hezbollah and Israel, Catholic Relief Services worked in partnership with our sister agency, Caritas Lebanon, to provide emergency assistance to more than 100,000 people around the country. And in the past year, our ties with Caritas Lebanon have only grown closer.

I saw this collaboration in action last month, when I had the privilege of visiting Lebanon and witnessing this extraordinary partnership. My itinerary included the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, which provides a vital outreach to the approximately 200,000 migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in Lebanon. The people they assist include Iraqi refugees, both Muslim and Christian, as well as the large number of foreign workers in and around Beirut, many of them women employed as domestic laborers.

At the Migrant Center, I met a young woman whose story touched me to the core. This 20-year-old woman, who was from a small village in northern Ethiopia, is married but separated from her husband. To support herself and her 3-year-old son, she sought work in Saudi Arabia. Her brother sent \$300 to an acquaintance in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa who was to arrange for her travel from there. By the time she arrived in Addis, the friend had vanished. Alone and without resources, the woman applied to an agency that placed her as a domestic worker in Lebanon.

The work in Lebanon was hard, and the Ethiopian woman had a difficult time adjusting. She stayed with her first employer for three months before being returned to the agency because she was too homesick and sad. The agency placed her in another household, where her employer scolded her constantly. She fled after four days.

Left alone in a foreign country, she accepted an offer of assistance from a taxicab driver. Tragically, his intentions were far from benevolent. He took her into some woods, raped her, then threw her off a cliff and left her to die. Some men hunting in the area found her and notified the police. She was rushed to the hospital, where – after a week's delay because of questions about who would pay for treatment – she underwent surgery for a fractured back. As a result of her injuries and the delay, she is paralyzed below the waist.

The Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center received a formal request from the Ethiopian consulate in Lebanon to take charge of this woman. After her discharge from the

hospital, she was lodged at a Caritas-run safe house in Beirut, where she received basic assistance for follow-up care, including physical therapy, as well as trauma counseling. One of the Migrant Center's lawyers is following up on her case.

The matter of the young woman's return to Ethiopia was still in question when I saw her last month. I am happy to report that in a coordinated effort between Caritas Lebanon, CRS Lebanon, CRS Ethiopia and the Adigrat (Ethiopia) Catholic Secretariat, the woman was escorted by a worker with the Migrant Center and is back home with her son and family. CRS will continue to follow up to ensure that she receives the ongoing care she needs.