

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Film offers glimpse into humanitarian crisis

The Za'atari camp in Jordan, home to 85,000 Syrian refugees, is a place well known to University of Tasmania Lecturer Kym Belchynden.

When not teaching international nutrition and public health in Launceston, Ms Blechynden is often on deployed at short notice to humanitarian emergencies and conflict zones across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

The Za'atari camp is one such place. The camp for Syrian refugees is the setting of a new film, *Salam Neighbor*, which will have its Australian premier at University of Tasmania campuses next week.

Through the camp, just seven kilometres from the Syrian border, the filmmakers provide an intimate look at the world's most dire humanitarian crisis. It was first time the United Nations allowed a group of filmmakers to be embedded in a refugee camp and officially registered with a tent.

The film goes beyond facts, figures, and statistics. It portrays real-life stories of people like Um Ali, a woman struggling to overcome personal loss and cultural barriers, and the street-smart, 10-year-old Raouf, whose trauma hides just beneath his ever present smile.

Ms Blechynden previously managed the implementation of an emergency nutrition program in the Za'atari camp.

"I spent two years working on the Syrian response, including Za'atari camp, which is the second largest camp in the world," she said.

"I remember the first day arriving at the camp, and seeing this sea of white tents and caravans stretching across the desert. The scale and size of the camp was remarkable.

"In winter the camp was extremely cold with snow, in summer so dry and hot with strong winds. The resilience of the community members living in Za'atari was striking; you would come around a corner and see small stalls set up selling falafel, perfume, fresh fruit and vegetables, household goods, and then small pockets of vegetables growing outside a tent. They were a small sense of normalcy, in a very tough situation.

"However, one thing in common with nearly everyone I spoke to is that they wanted to return home to Syria, and for themselves and their families to be safe. Six years on from the conflict, and four years on since Za'atari camp opened, it is sad to see that camps like

Za'atari are still needed, and that support for the Syrian refugee crisis is needed more than ever.”

The film is being presented by local community organisation A Fairer World and the University's Institute for the Study of Social Change. All funds raised from the film screenings will go towards A Fairer World's diversity education programs in Tasmanian schools.

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