

## **Turkey's showcase refugee camps hide truth about worst facilities, Canadian visitor says**

**By Alia Dharssi, National Post | December 9, 2015**

Turkey has gained a reputation for building outstanding refugee camps, but it may be hiding the truth about its worst facilities, where residents must survive sub-zero winter weather without heat and don't have enough food, says a York University professor who recently returned from the region.

"When some journalist from The New York Times comes to Turkey or Angelina Jolie comes to Turkey and wants to visit a camp, they are taken to these model camps," sociologist Secil Ertorer told delegates at the Pathways to Prosperity Conference in Toronto last week.

"They are 'container' (camps). They have health centres. They have schools. They have everything."

While refugee camps are often associated with crowded tents, poor sanitation and kids out of school, some camps in Turkey feature solid "container" housing, electricity and plumbing.

But, after spending August and September in Turkey, Ertorer said it appears the country is showing only its best facilities to the outside world.

"I hear through the refugees and people working in the field that all camps are not standard," she said.

Ertorer was told about overcrowded camps where refugees didn't have enough food or toilets, shivered in tents without heat during the winter and were discriminated against by officials. There were also rumours of prostitution and orphans being sold by camp staff.

Ramazan Sevinc, a spokesman for the Turkish government, said in an email these reports are inaccurate.

“We provide the same accommodation, food, health, education and other humanitarian needs (in all the camps) with standards well above the international ones. Our camps are open to journalists and researchers and they may visit the camps anytime.”

Even if the reports were true, it wouldn't make sense for Turkey to hide bad camps because it needs more international aid for Syrians, said Selcuk Unal, Turkey's ambassador in Ottawa. Turkey has spent US\$8 billion on Syrian refugees, but received only US\$417 million in international aid, he said.

Ertorer could not verify what she heard about Turkey's 25 refugee camps because she couldn't get a permit to visit. A Turkish colleague also withdrew from the project when Ankara placed restrictions on local academics researching refugees last spring.

However, she had extensive interviews with refugees, United Nations staff, government officials, non-profit employees and others in the Turkish capital and Izmir, a port city on the refugee route to Greece.

In these places, dire economic conditions are contributing to the refugee crisis by pushing people who want to stay in Turkey to head to Europe.

Ertorer said she saw Syrians living on sidewalks and slums in Izmir and Ankara. Children are getting sick and suffering nerve damage in shoe factories in Izmir because they apply toxic glue with bare hands.

**Source:** <http://tinyurl.com/z5vdzb5>