

**The visit of the Turkish National Pediatric Society (TNPS) team to the Syrian Safe Zone in order to observe the current status of healthcare services and education activities related to children and child health.**

A team consisting of six members from the TNPS, under the leadership of Prof. Enver Hasanoglu (President of the IPA, Secretary General of the TNPS), went to the Syrian Safe Zone in cooperation with the Yunus Emre Institute (an institute established by the Turkish Republic Ministry of Culture, with a mission “to enhance Türkiye’s recognition, credibility and prestige in the international arena”) on November 21-22, 2022. The purpose of the visit was to observe the current health status of children and conditions related to child health in the region, as well as to learn about the activities of several institutions/organizations that try to provide healthcare services, medical education, language education, primary and high school education. Needless to say, the main aim was to determine activities and plan projects which are built on these first observations to improve child health in the region.

The Northern Syria Safe Zone is a demilitarized zone established on the Syrian side of the Syria–Turkey border to maintain security along the border. The TNPS team visited several cities including Afrin, Az’ez, Marea, Cobanbey and Al-Bab in the safe zone.

Prof. Enver Hasanoglu (President of the IPA, Secretary General of the TNPS), Prof. Koray Boduroglu (Past President of the TNPS, President of the UNPSTR), Prof. Ilyas Okur (Executive Committee Member of the TNPS, Vice Dean of the Gazi University Medical Faculty), Prof. Orhan Derman (Hacettepe University Department of Adolescent Health), Assoc. Prof. Selman Kesici (Hacettepe University Dept. of Pediatric Intensive Care), and Prof. Ibrahim Murat Hirfanoglu (Gazi University Dept. of Neonatology) were the members of the team. The director of the Yunus Emre Institute for the region, Mr. Fikret Çıtak, accompanied the team during the whole

visit. He organized and facilitated the meetings with several individuals including the Presidents of the Regional Assemblies of Az'ez, Afrin and Al-Bab.

On the first day, the team visited;

-The Afrin Yunus Emre Institute Center where Mrs. Emine Altinkaynak (Turkish Language Teacher) informed the team about the children learning the Turkish language in their programs and art/cultural activities that the children participate in. The opening ceremony of an Art Exhibition took place later on, where Dr. Hasanoglu delivered a speech emphasizing the importance of collaboration between different disciplines for a better future for our children and how important art is for the development of healthy children.



Picture1: Afrin Yunus Emre Institute Center, Art Exhibition and Prof. Hasanoglu's opening remarks.



Picture 2: TNPS team and Mr. Fikret Çıtak with the students of the Institute

-The second visit was to the Afrin Regional Assembly Center to meet the President Mr. Mohammed Seyh Rashid. President Rashid informed the team members regarding the situation in the region, problems and what they do to solve them. He also gave information about the child health issues in the region, including the number of qualified healthcare providers and pediatricians, the nutrition and immunization status of the children, problems that children living in tent cities face and those who are displaced.



Picture 3: The team with Afrin Regional Assembly President Mr. Mohammed Seyh Rashid

-After Afrin, the team headed to Az'ez Vatan Hospital which was built by the Turkish Republic Ministry of Health to meet the Medical Director Dr. Murat Tepe. He informed the team regarding the healthcare services provided in the hospital for children, the working conditions of the pediatricians and pediatric nurses and how they supply medications, devices and other supplies. Members of the team visited the Pediatric intensive care unit (ICU) and the Neonatal ICU and we were impressed by the level of service provided in those units. The members of the team made some recommendations to improve the services provided.



Picture 4: TNPS team with the Medical Director Dr. Murat Tepe and NICU in Vatan Hospital

-The next visit in Az'ez was to the Az'ez Regional Assembly Center to meet the President Mr. Mahmut Hamdan Yusuf. As a former primary school teacher, he emphasized the importance of child education and how this is implemented and also how they collaborate with the Yunus Emre Institute. He also mentioned the child health issues which were similar to those discussed in previous conversations.





Picture 5: In Az'ez Regional Assembly with President Mr. Mahmut Hamdan Yusuf

-The last visit of the first day was to the Free Aleppo University Medical Faculty in the Marea region. There was a graduation ceremony in the garden. The team met with the Rector of the University, the Dean of the Medical Faculty and other faculty members. The quality of the medical education and qualification of the faculty members and the graduates were discussed. They informed the members of the TNPS about their medical faculty curriculum and the high quality of their program and their request that the program is approved and recognized by the Turkish Higher Education Council.



Picture 6: In Aleppo University Medical Faculty

-The second day began with a visit to the Cobanbey Medical Faculty of the Health Sciences University of the Turkish Republic. The TNPS team met with Prof. Mustafa Aldemir (Dean of the Medical Faculty), Dr. Ali Muhsin Güvelioglu (Coordinator of Health Services in Safe Zone), Dr. Kadir Söylemez (Coordinator of Pediatric Health Services in Safe Zone), and Dr. Hüseyin Gürbüz (Medical Director of the Cobanbey Hospital). Coordinators presented data regarding the system used to coordinate the healthcare services within the various parts of the region, the patient referral and the transportation system between Turkish hospitals and regional hospitals. The dean of the faculty introduced the team members to the students of the medical faculty, this gave the team an opportunity to learn about the expectation and needs of the students. Two lectures were given by the members of the visiting team on malnutrition and adolescent health problems to the medical faculty students and pediatricians of the Cobanbey hospital.

The team members also found a chance to visit the pediatric ICU, NICU, inpatient wards, delivery room, central laboratory unit and pediatric outpatient clinics of the hospital.

Observations were shared with the staff and the medical director of the hospital.



Picture 7: Cobanbey Medical Faculty staff and students with TNPS members

Later, Kilis City Health Director Dr. Mahmut Arık from Türkiye and the President of the Syrian Turkmen Federation Mr. Mahmut Zengin joined the group and expressed their gratitude because of the visit of the TNPS to the region by presenting a plate to Dr. Hasanoglu.



Picture 8: President of the Syrian Turkmen Federation Mr. Mahmut Zengin presenting a plate to Dr. Hasanoglu

-Later on, the TNPS team went to Al-Bab to visit the Al-Bab Hospital which was built by the Turkish Ministry of Health. The medical director of the hospital Dr. Ziyadettin Hastürk and his colleagues in the hospital gave a brief report about their activities and issues related to child



health in the region. A tour of several departments and pediatric units of the hospital was made again.



Picture 9: Al-Bab Hospital Medical Director and staff with TNPS members

- The TNPS visited the Yunus Emre Institute Centers in Afrin, Az'ez and Al-Bab. The team members were impressed by the efforts of the teachers and the staff working in these centers to teach the Turkish language, promote and disseminate Turkish culture and art to the Syrian children and other citizens. The centers were all very well designed with lecture halls, music and art rooms, sport facilities and libraries.





Picture 10: The Yunus Emre Centers in the Safe Zone



Picture 10: Students and the library in the Yunus Emre Center

During this two-day visit we had the opportunity to visit several hospitals, medical faculties, culture and art centers, regional assemblies, streets and schools where children were also there and taken care of. We made observations, assessments and evaluations regarding child health and pediatrics. Currently, each member of the team is preparing a report that will be discussed in the next Executive Committee meeting of the TNPS, so that we can plan future steps and actions to be taken for a better future for children living in the Syrian Safe Zone and surrounding area.