Stories of Displacement: Laila’s Family

In the last days of the battle for west Mosul, Laila, her sister Jamila and their children arrived at IOM’s Hammam Al-Alil field hospital with dust still covering their clothes. They were rushed in by ambulance with Raghad, Laila’s 12-year-old daughter. Raghad had been shot by an ISIL sniper while trying to escape the ISIL-controlled neighborhood of west Mosul as Iraqi forces closed in. By the time Raghad arrived at IOM’s field hospital it was too late; she died shortly afterwards of her unattended wound.

The two sisters and their children had been trapped in the neighborhood for four days, moving from one destroyed house to the other as they desperately tried to tend to the injured girl in their arms. Raghad’s 11-year-old sister wanted to save her sibling; she begged her mother to let her go to the river to bring water, thinking that would save her injured sister.

Three months earlier, the families had run out of water in their neighborhood but ISIL wouldn’t give them any. The women’s husbands – also brothers – risking it all, decided to go out and find water for their thirsty children. But as ISIL indiscriminately lobbed mortar in a desperate attempt to stop the advancing Iraqi forces, a mortar shell landed near the two men, killing them on the spot.

Laila and her family sat silently at the field hospital, lowering their heads, some sobbing, waiting for preparations to be completed to move Raghad’s body to the forensic department in east Mosul to receive a death certificate.

Laila and Farah sitting on a trolley in Hammam Al-Alil field hospital (©Raber Y. Aziiz/IOM Iraq 2017).