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REFUGEES IN SERBIA EXPOSED TO LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS

REFUGEES in Serbia are experiencing life-threatening conditions as temperatures in the south of the country have plummeted to -30°C.

Marija Vranesevic, Programme Manager at Philanthropy – Christian Aid’s partner organisation in Serbia, commented: ‘Refugees are being exposed to life-threatening conditions because of the extremely cold weather we are currently experiencing. They are also at risk of disease, as well as a flu epidemic.

‘While most refugees are now staying in heated buildings, some are still outside of the camps. These people are particularly vulnerable. Every day we are seeing more and more refugees arrive. We are witnessing a visible increase in levels of anxiety and depression among the refugee population.

‘The provision of food is becoming a major challenge for agencies. In this cold weather, people need access to hot, nutritious food, as well as adequate shelter and heating.’

Earlier today it was reported that two Iraqi men have died in Bulgaria after walking through the snow for 48 hours without access to food or water. In Greece, where temperatures have reached -14°C, an Afghan refugee has also died.

Tom Viita, Head of Advocacy at Christian Aid, said: ‘It’s wholly unacceptable that refugees are freezing to death, while European leaders turn a blind eye to the suffering of people on their doorsteps.

‘European countries last year pledged to relocate 66,000 refugees from Greece. Yet almost a year on, only twenty per cent of them have been relocated. Across Europe the political will to act is falling desperately short of the human need.

'People need immediate protection. Governments and agencies need to pull together to stop people needlessly dying, and work to find effective longer-term solutions that honour everybody's human dignity, regardless of origin.'

Christian Aid partners in Serbia and Greece are currently providing hot meals, water and sanitation facilities, and cash assistance to refugee communities. In the sites in which our partners work, refugees have been moved into heated buildings.

In addition, our partners are providing legal protection services to unaccompanied children, and families, on the Greek mainland, and housing support to some of the most vulnerable refugees awaiting relocation to other countries in Europe. Christian Aid and our partners continue to provide support to refugees and displaced people in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, South Sudan, and many other countries throughout the world.

Notes to Editors:

1. Christian Aid works in some of the world's poorest communities in around 40 countries at any one time. We act where there is great need, regardless of religion, helping people to live a full life, free from poverty. We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance in tackling the root causes of poverty as well as its effects.

2. Christian Aid's core belief is that the world can and must be changed so that poverty is ended: this is what we stand for. Everything we do is about ending poverty and injustice: swiftly, effectively, sustainably. Our strategy document Partnership for Change www.christianaid.org.uk/images/partnership-for-change-summary.pdf explains how we set about this task.

3. Christian Aid is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of more than 130 churches and church-related organisations that work together in humanitarian assistance, advocacy and development. Further details at <http://actalliance.org>

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