

Syrian Kurds Flee

In September of 2014, Istanbul-based, AFP photographer Bulent Kilic headed to the Turkey-Syria border as news that ISIS forces were moving in to take control of northern Syria. Kurd officials in the area said that an ISIS victory could lead to massacres and told Kurd civilians to flee to Turkey.

Thousands of Kurds poured across the border, many traveling for miles with their belongings and families. Once across the border, men escorting their families were prevented by Turkish authorities from returning to Syria to fight. Clashes between Kurds and Turkish forces ensued.

“What was most tiring and difficult for me to deal with at the moment was to look on the face of people as I took their picture. Fear and despair on their faces had increased the psychological pressure on me,” Mr. Kilic explained.

His coverage focused on those most affected, the children and the elderly. The former deal with circumstances, like hunger and exhaustion, that are unexplainable even to an adult, and the latter despite their knowledge, but because of infirmities, must still flee. In his images, Mr. Kilic communicates anguish, desperation, futility and violence all quelled with the image of a young girl being a child, shy and curious.

Mr. Kilic's coverage of the refugees has been published throughout the U.S., bringing great acclaim and awards for the photographer. But beyond the accolades, “All these events have caused the death of uncountable number of people and changed the lives of many others as they still continue to affect daily life in these regions. It has been difficult for me to cope with the influence of the destruction to which people were exposed. However, I felt personally responsible for showing the tragic dimensions of the situations I encountered. I have attempted to unveil the basic human condition through the reflections that I found mostly in the facial expressions of people, in some cases the collective reactions displaying a solidarity, and hoped that my photographs could evoke an ethical response in the viewer.”