

## World Mental Health Day at Field Hospital

*In the distance, throughout the day, you could hear the sound of explosions south of Al-Mawasi. Kids ran around with with bare feet, ecstatic that there was music, dancing, clapping, that adults were jumping around with them and singing well-known songs. It is the definition of bittersweet – the happiness expressed by kids of all ages, some with bandages, most with no shoes. The outpatient department waiting area was overcrowded with joy, smiles, laughter, shouts, for maybe the first time. Unfortunately, staff and volunteers know that this is a temporary reprieve from the reality of their lives. Parents looked on, smiling and encouraging any little shy ones to get involved. The PRCS staff/volunteers were incredible, giving it their all and making sure every child was noticed and included.*

### **Hospital ward**

*The male ward is more crowded than the female or pediatric ones. There are two for men, one for women, and one for children. There is a contrast between the patients, many of whom lay motionless on their beds, and their friends or family (visitors) who are the ones bustling around. Flies are a constant irritation, and those with severe burns or open wounds that are still drying out (like Zakaria) have a mosquito net around their beds to keep the insects away. There are multiple bandages at the end of limbs, indicating where an amputation was needed, mostly on legs. External fixators can be seen on some patients, where screws are placed above and below a fracture to keep it in place while healing. In countries with robust medical systems, these screws or plates would be inserted into the leg, and then stitched up over it, but in war surgery, this is kept on the outside so the wound stays 'open' to reduce risk of infection. Bullets, shrapnel, etc. are not sterile, and there is a high chance of infection unless procedures like this are put in place. Even then, it is a challenge to avoid infection, particularly when safe water or saline is in short supply. For wounds like most of those Zakaria has, to cover them could also cause infection*



*(dust, sand, general germs could fester under a bandage), so they are left with nothing on them to dry out.*

*In the ward, the floor is made of grey tarpaulin, and cleaners constantly come in to sweep out any sand or dust that made its way in. The walls are made of canvas, and people hang their few items of clothes or hats on a string behind their bed. The heat is almost oppressive, and miniature fans are beside most patients – doing little but blowing hot air around. It is noisy with so many people talking, and nurses or doctors come around and check on patients. Outside each ward is a wooden box with non-potable water and liquid hand soap, to try and reduce spread of infections or disease within the wards. Even with these washing stations, it is hard to feel your hands are ever really clean for long – the humidity, the heat, the sweat, the dust that attaches itself to you every time you touch something, means constant stickiness and grime.*



#### **Pediatric ward**

*In the pediatric ward, half the beds are full, all with children 11 years old or younger. Mothers sit next to the beds, often holding babies or speaking with other siblings who don't have anywhere else they can go during the day besides with their parents. It is hot, and there are usually beads of sweat along the brows of children, damp curls sticking to their necks despite the small fans. On the canvas wall behind each bed is a coloring in or two, a heartfelt attempt at livening up the otherwise beige room. Beige canvas, grey floor tarpaulin, beige beds. Pediatric wards usually have televisions, games, brightly painted walls, but this ward doesn't have those luxuries.*