

IDOMENI

A CHILDHOOD IN THE CAMPS

Photographic documentary by

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At the beginning of March 2016, I volunteered to spend three weeks working with the refugees in the Idomeni camp in Northern Greece – Macedonia had just closed its borders.

Every day more and more of them arrived, entire families, exhausted after their long and dangerous journey. But they were happy because they were convinced that they would be able to continue on towards their promised land, Northern Europe.

However it had not been long since Idomeni had become nothing more than a cul-de-sac of misery and despair where thousands of families were left stranded. I saw them undergo a transformation, day after day, losing their minds, being devoured by this most inhuman camp. How could it be any different, when they had lost everything, sometimes even their own families, and when there was no hope left nor goal to reach?

They were utterly destitute, living amongst rubbish and excrement. There were not enough toilets nor water supplies, and they had to queue for hours for a bowl of soup or to see a doctor.... Their daily activity was limited to satisfying their primary needs (drinking, eating, staying warm) and waiting. Waiting for what?! As long as there is hope, you can cope with the impossible, cross seas and climb mountains.

But on March 8th, 2016, Europe put a stop to that hope by officially closing the Balkan refugee route.

Instead, they had the choice of staying here to decay in Northern Greece, or be sent back to Turkey!

Europe had missed an opportunity to change the course of history.

Whenever any society closes itself in, building walls rather than bridges, it starts to wither and ultimately fades away!

I brought back photos through which I wanted to illustrate their daily lives, their stories, their hopes and especially their despair. My work focused naturally on children and families. Perhaps because I myself have two little girls and because I couldn't avoid thinking about them when I saw all those children. They also probably reminded me, a father, of just how courageous those men and women were.

The Idomeni refugee camp was emptied at the end of May 2016, making these photos even more special. They record what these families lived through, amongst us here in Europe in 2016.