



BRIEFING:

6 YEARS ON

A WAR ON SYRIA'S CHILDREN

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH



FOREWORD

It is tragic that we're having to write a report to mark the 6th anniversary of a war that has now been raging for as long as World War 2. It has been a savage conflict, the fighting conducted without mercy. Tens of thousands of children have been killed, with millions more having to flee their homes. Many have lived in the refugee camps for so long that they cannot even remember their lives before the war. If or when they return home, their futures hang in the balance. Many have lost out on the vital education they need to achieve their dreams and ambitions. Many others will struggle with the trauma they have experienced from the atrocities they have seen and endured.

This is why I am so proud to be a Global Ambassador for War Child UK. It is responding to the war on the ground in places like Jordan and Lebanon. It is working tirelessly to support the children of Syria, helping them to access the education that is their right, and providing them with the support they need to deal with the traumas they have experienced. And it is why I am supporting War Child UK's Enough is Enough campaign because, let's be clear, what we have witnessed these last six years is a war on Syria's children. The UN and human rights groups have provided a steady stream of information detailing the scale of the atrocities, so we cannot say that we didn't know what was happening. Yet the international community has by and large stood on the side-lines and allowed this disaster to unfold. We wring our hands, deplore the violence, but do little to try to bring it to an end.

That is why I am joining War Child UK in saying to world leaders that today, on this grim anniversary, Enough is Enough. And it is why I support this report, which outlines exactly what it is that the international community needs to do to protect Syria's children, bring the fighting to an end, and help rebuild the country so that Syria's children will one day have a future to return to.



Carey Mulligan
War Child Global Ambassador

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After six years of brutal and senseless conflict in Syria, more than 400,000¹ people have been killed, including up to 55,000 children.² This represents one child killed every hour since the war began. Tens of thousands of children have lost one or both parents and have suffered life-changing injuries, and 411,000 children are living under siege. At least 13.5 million people need humanitarian assistance inside Syria alone, while over five million refugees from Syria have fled to neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.³ Many have died trying to reach Europe, where a hostile political climate has seen the legitimate right of refugees for asylum undermined.

The last year has seen the crisis worsen dramatically. Fighting has raged across the country and the Syrian and Russian air forces have escalated aerial bombardment of besieged areas. The siege of Aleppo in the final months of 2016 demonstrated both a new low of unimaginable savagery by belligerents and the impotence of the international community to stop the killing.

For six years, the extent of the international community's diplomatic, military and humanitarian interventions in Syria have failed to address the scale of the unfolding crisis. In fact, the involvement of some world powers has only served to exacerbate the conflict. The United Nations Security Council has provided a forum for debate and passed resolutions to pressure member states to abide by their commitments, yet its words often ring hollow as resolutions go unheeded.

Furthermore, for Syrian civilians who have escaped to neighbouring countries, emotional and psychosocial problems are compounded every day by the crushing poverty they experience in refugee camps and on the streets of Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, which host the majority of the five million people who have fled Syria since 2011. Vast swathes of society have seen livelihoods, land and assets lost through the conflict, beginning a cycle of intergenerational poverty that will see younger Syrians denied opportunities that were available to their parents.



The UN Regional Response and Resilience Plan⁴ has provided a robust structure for donors and regional governments to coordinate aid and manage the burden of this massive influx. The people and governments of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have extended generous help to refugees, yet they bear a heavy load and require greater international support.

Until the war ends, the refugee crisis will continue unabated. This brutal civil war has seen civilians repeatedly targeted, hospitals destroyed, towns and villages besieged, chemical weapons deployed, as well as consistent blocking of humanitarian aid from those that need it. The Syrian regime and its allies are primarily responsible for the horror that people face daily, whilst armed opposition and extremist groups are also responsible for brutal acts. UN Security Council resolutions have been repeatedly flouted over the past year, most recently with the Russian and Chinese governments stooping to veto a resolution against the use of chemical weapons in Syria.⁵ Current efforts at peace negotiations under Russian and UN auspices have not improved the humanitarian situation and children continue to suffer.

Despite this bleak picture there are actions the international community can undertake to address urgent needs and plan for a more stable and secure future for Syria's children.

1 UN Envoy April 2016 <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2016/04/syria-envoy-claims-400000-have-died-in-syria-conflict/#.WLVe01XyjIU>
 2 <http://www.iamsyria.org/death-tolls.html>
 3 UNOCHA <http://www.unocha.org/syria>
 4 UNOCHA <http://www.unocha.org/syria>
 5 <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/3RP-Regional-Overview-2016-2017.pdf>



4 WAYS TO PROTECT SYRIA'S CHILDREN

4 WAYS TO PROTECT SYRIA'S CHILDREN

1. A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT

- a) All actors must ensure that current political negotiations lead to an effective cessation of hostilities as a first step towards a lasting agreement to end the violence.
- b) The international community must make it clear the pursuit of justice is an essential component of any future peace agreement, and must form a cornerstone of all peace negotiations.

2. PROTECTION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE

- a) The international community must continue to urge all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law (IHL), to condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and acknowledge that civilians, and in particular children, must be protected.
- b) Parties to the conflict (including the Syrian regime and its allied militias, the Russian and Iranian governments, opposition groups and the international coalition fighting ISIS) found to be committing grave violations of children's rights must be listed in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. They must commit to immediately end such violations, and be held to account for the atrocities they have committed.
- c) The international community must continue to push for the ICC to have a mandate in Syria, and push for justice for the innocent victims of the conflict, whether in the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, or through other avenues, including the use of universal jurisdiction. Pressure must continue to be put on the Syrian regime to allow access for independent monitors to observe and record breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- d) All UN member states must call for the full and prompt implementation of Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016),⁶ ensuring accountability for violations of IHL. Targeted sanctions should be considered for all actors found to have attacked medical facilities and personnel, to address non-compliance with this resolution.



3. IMPROVE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS:

- a) The international community must push both the Syrian regime and opposition to make an immediate commitment to allow all civilians who wish to leave besieged areas to do so and to allow immediate access to aid from across border and conflict lines, without impediment.
- b) Commitment to humanitarian principles must be made central to all political negotiations by the sponsoring powers.
- c) Alternative options for enabling besieged areas to receive life-saving aid must be pursued vigorously by donors and international civil society, including air drops of humanitarian relief as a last resort.

4. DELIVERING ON REGIONAL FUNDING PLEDGES AND POLICY COMMITMENTS:

The progress made at the London Conference 2016 and Helsinki Conference 2017 must be built on.

- a) Critical humanitarian funding shortfalls and outstanding policy reform commitments on refugee livelihoods must be acted on immediately.
- b) Donors and host countries must help prevent a lost generation by ensuring that every Syrian child benefits from a quality education. This requires new places in public schools, more emphasis on ensuring retention and learning outcomes, and addressing the worst forms of child labour.
- c) Donors must follow through on multi-year aid funding as foreseen in the commitments made at the London Conference 2016.
- d) Wealthy countries must increase resettlement to at least 10% of the refugee population from Syria by the end of 2017.



CHILDREN ARE LIVING UNDER SIEGE⁷

⁶ UNSCR 2286 (2016) Condemning attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12347.doc.htm>

⁷ <http://hno-syria.org/>



THE SYRIAN CONFLICT: A WAR ON CHILDREN

THE SYRIAN CONFLICT: A WAR ON CHILDREN

**'DOCUMENTATION IS IMPORTANT,
BECAUSE THOSE WHO ARE
COMMITTING ATROCITIES ON
BOTH SIDES NEED TO BE HELD
ACCOUNTABLE ONE DAY.'**⁸

Leila Zerrougui- Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict

While it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of children killed over the six years of conflict, the deaths of 24,578 children have been documented (see Fig 1),⁹ with some sources estimating the death toll to be as high as 55,000.¹⁰ Since 2011 the deliberate targeting of children has been a hallmark of the conflict. The Syrian regime and the militias it sponsors have shot, detained, tortured and sexually abused children.¹¹ Opposition and jihadist forces also stand charged with recruiting child soldiers, and failing to properly protect children when engaging in hostilities in civilian areas. Nearly one million civilians remain under siege,¹² subject to bombing and military assault. This includes more than 400,000 children. Their suffering is compounded by the internal obstruction of humanitarian relief, in contravention of international humanitarian law.¹³

Amid this litany of suffering a solution seems far away. The extremity of violence inflicted by the regime, regional interference, the irreconcilable demands of jihadist groups and great power politicking have pushed a meaningful ceasefire further away with each passing year.

⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/un-children-syrias-civil-war-suffer-unspeakable-abuse/>

⁹ <http://sn4hr.org/>

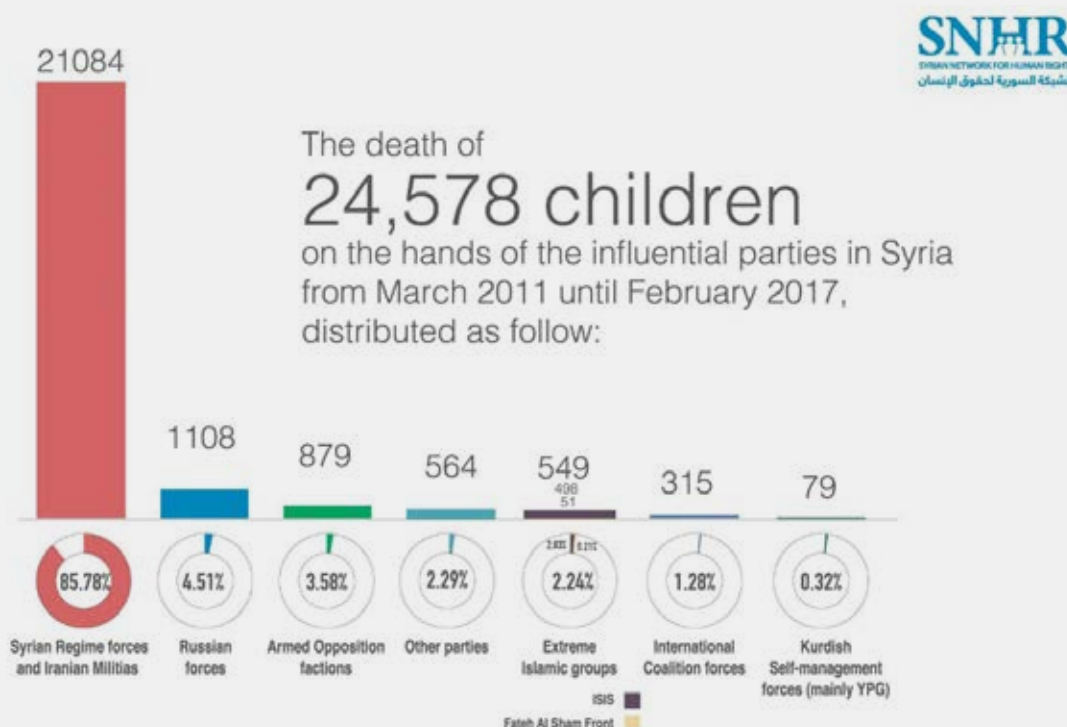
¹⁰ <http://www.iamsyria.org/death-tolls.html>

¹¹ War Child, July 2012. Syria: A War on Childhood.

¹² UNOCHA, December 2016 https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Syria/2017_Syria_hno.pdf

¹³ International humanitarian law prohibits parties to conflict from engaging in attacks on humanitarian convoys.

Figure 1: Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates of child deaths since start of conflict, based on documentary evidence. The actual figure is likely much higher.



KILLING AND MAIMING

All parties to the conflict are bound by international humanitarian law, customary international law and human rights law. While all major parties to the conflict have been implicated in human rights violations, the Syrian regime is estimated to be responsible for 95% of all civilian deaths.¹⁴ The indiscriminate shelling of densely populated areas, including mortar, barrel bombs and chemical weapons, are a major cause of child casualties. Many more people have also died at the hands of army snipers, through starvation in besieged areas, and at the hands of torturers in regime detention centres.

Almost without parallel in modern conflict is the systematic detention, torture and killing of prisoners considered regime opponents. Amnesty International has recently reported that in one Syrian regime jail an estimated 13,000 people have been hanged in the past five years.¹⁵ Since the start of the conflict human rights groups have recorded the arbitrary arrest and torture of children in detention.¹⁶

'AT FIRST, TWO CHILDREN AND THEIR MOTHER ARRIVED TO THE HOSPITAL. THE CHILDREN WERE UNCONSCIOUS AND UNRESPONSIVE. THEIR MOTHER WAS SHIVERING, COUGHING, AND WHEEZING. SHE BARELY COULD BREATHE AND WAS DROOLING HEAVILY FROM HER MOUTH. THEIR CLOTHES WERE COVERED IN A WET SUBSTANCE WITH A SHARP SMELL, LIKE CHLORINE. THE TWO KIDS WENT INTO CARDIAC ARREST AFTER AROUND 15 MINUTES. WE TRIED TO RESUSCITATE THEM TO NO AVAIL. FIVE MINUTES LATER, THE MOTHER ALSO DIED.'¹⁷

Human Rights Watch interview with doctor describing aftermath of chemical weapons attack in Aleppo, September 2016

¹⁴ <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/03/15/19374/>

¹⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/syria-13000-secretly-hanged-saydnaya-military-prison-shocking-new-report>

¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/03/syria-stop-torture-children>

¹⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/28/syria-new-deadly-chemical-attacks>

ISIS has committed brutal atrocities against children, notably the murder of civilians and the mass sexual abuse of enslaved women and girls. It has also been reported that children recruited by ISIS have been executed for trying to escape.¹⁸ The last two years have seen the horrific phenomena of children being used to execute prisoners as part of a propaganda campaign.

With the growing number of parties involved in the conflict, the risk of grave violations against children increases. It is reported that children have been killed and maimed in airstrikes conducted by the US, UK and other countries against jihadists.¹⁹ In the summer of 2016, coalition airstrikes to drive ISIS from the city of Manbij near Aleppo killed 100 civilians, including children.²⁰

Figure 2: International humanitarian laws that govern conflict. All states and parties to the conflict are bound by these laws and conventions

Common Article 3	Which prohibits violence against civilians, including murder
Geneva Convention Article 23	which requires the free passage of medical and food essentials;
GC AP I Article 51	which requires the protection of civilians;
GC AP I Article 52	which prohibits attacks on civilian objects;
GC AP I Article 54	which prohibits attacks against objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population;
GC AP II Article 14	which prohibits the destruction of civilian foodstuffs and vital supplies;
ICRC Rule 1	which requires distinction between civilians and combatants;
ICRC Rule 31	which requires protection of humanitarian relief personnel;
ICRC Rule 89	which prohibits murder;
Rome Statute Article 8	which prohibits attacks on civilians and prohibits the targeting of humanitarian relief personnel;

As listed above, all parties to the conflict are bound by rules and conventions that govern conduct in conflict. It is incumbent on the international community to exert all possible pressure on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law (IHL), to condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and acknowledge that civilians, and in particular children, must be protected. All UN member states must call for the full and prompt implementation of Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016), ensuring accountability for violations of IHL. Targeted sanctions should be considered for all actors found to have attacked medical facilities and personnel, to address non-compliance with this resolution. Furthermore, diplomatic pressure must be put on the Syrian regime to allow independent monitors into the country to observe and report violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Parties to the conflict (including the Syrian regime and its allied militias, the Russian and Iranian governments, opposition groups and the international coalition fighting ISIS) found to be committing grave violations of children's rights must be listed in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. This report is a critical tool for holding governments and armed groups to account, and all Security Council members should champion the report and its findings.

¹ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries-caac/syria/>

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/usa-must-come-clean-about-civilian-deaths-caused-by-coalition-air-strikes-in-syria/>

³ *ibid*

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 6,500 schools have been destroyed, partially damaged, used as shelters for internally displaced persons or rendered otherwise inaccessible. With 1.7 million children out of school, high youth unemployment and limited opportunities for development and growth, the odds are increasingly stacked against the next generation of Syrians.²¹

The organisation Physicians for Human Rights documented 400 attacks on 276 medical facilities, with the deaths of 768 medical personnel, between the beginning of the conflict and the end of July 2016. By its count, 362 of the attacks and 713 of the deaths can be attributed to the Syrian regime and its allies. Throughout the final months of 2016, dozens of attacks on hospitals and clinics in opposition controlled parts of Aleppo were reported. The frequency and accuracy of attacks indicates that hospitals are being targeted deliberately. In February 2016, the health charity Médecins Sans Frontières abandoned its policy of sharing the geographical coordinates of its medical facilities with the Syrian regime and its allies amid concerns that doing so could make them targets.²²

Rising incidence of disease include measles, diarrhoea, and respiratory illnesses, which are among the deadliest worldwide for children aged under five.²³ As one measure of how far Syria's health systems have fallen, in 2010, a total of 26 measles cases were reported in the whole of Syria for the entire year. In the first week of 2014, 84 cases were recorded in children aged under five in northern Syria alone.²⁴

Parties to the conflict must facilitate safe, unfettered and consistent access for impartial aid agencies to all parts of Syria in order to respond to the humanitarian needs of civilians. They must grant freedom of movement to civilians and facilitate their access to the goods and services they need, and end all attacks on aid workers and humanitarian convoys, investigating and taking appropriate action where these attacks have taken place. Commitment to humanitarian principles must be made central to all political negotiations by the sponsoring powers. The success of the negotiations must be measured by the abiding commitments made by all parties to unlock humanitarian access and end unlawful sieges.



²¹ <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syria.html>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/18/msf-will-not-share-syria-gps-locations-after-deliberate-attacks>

²³ <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/2014-03/millions-childrens-lives-risk-collapse-syrian-health-system>

²⁴ Save the Children, March 2015. A Devastating Toll: The Impact of Three Years of War on the Health of Syria's Children

ALEPPO- A NEW LOW IN MODERN WARFARE

*From the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*²⁵

As part of a strategy to force surrender, pro-Government forces encircled eastern Aleppo city in late July 2016 and trapped civilians without adequate food or medical supplies. Between July and December 2016, Syrian and Russian forces carried out daily air strikes, claiming hundreds of lives and reducing hospitals, schools and markets to rubble. Syrian forces also used chlorine bombs in residential areas, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties.

Approximately 300 people – including 96 children – were killed in the first four days of the offensive alone. By mid-October, a lack of resources and medical supplies forced doctors to amputate limbs, which might have otherwise been saved. On 14 November, government artillery fire reportedly struck an orphanage providing shelter for 50 children in Salah al-Din district, injuring two boys aged 11 and 14 years. The children were subsequently moved to a basement, where they remained trapped for weeks. After several attempts, they were evacuated on 19 December. Conditions significantly worsened in December, when all hospitals were bombed out of service. Residents were concentrated in ever-shrinking territory, where they lived under aerial attacks, and with insufficient food, water and heating. Without medical facilities, several families had no choice but to leave the bodies of their dead and injured relatives in the streets. Many suffer from trauma and guilt for having survived the violence.

As the only children's hospital in eastern Aleppo, multiple air strikes on al-Hakim hospital had a devastating impact on children's access to health care. On 23 July, an air strike damaged the building and caused a power cut that led to the death of four new-borns in incubators. In an attempt to protect patients, the hospital was moved underground. Until this point, all hospitals in al-Shaar had been clearly marked, after which emblems were removed out of fear of being targeted.

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT AND INACTION

For six years, the world's powers have engaged in diplomacy, military action and in the humanitarian response, yet the crisis has spiralled further out of control with each passing year. The US, EU, Russia and regional states have a central role in addressing the devastating toll the conflict has taken on Syria and its society.

International action is needed to support a meaningful and durable peace process, immediately ending the grave violations of rights and addressing the barriers to humanitarian relief reaching those in need. Ultimately the international community will need to commit billions of dollars to repair Syria's shattered infrastructure and economy.

Since the beginning of the conflict, UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions demanding an end to the killing of civilians and the opening of humanitarian access have been consistently flouted by parties to the conflict and their international allies. The Russian Federation has used its veto seven times in the last five years to block resolutions designed to reduce civilian casualties and improve humanitarian access. Syrian children are paying the highest price for this deadlock in the Security Council.

²⁵ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/026/63/PDF/G1702663.pdf?OpenElement>

Given the international nature of Syria's war, the members of the UNSC with direct influence over the combatants must stand up for Syria's people and the stability and prosperity of the wider region. In its resolutions and statements, the UNSC has provided a framework for easing humanitarian suffering and issued repeated demands for its implementation.

Critically, UNSC resolutions that demand civilian protection must be upheld, including:

- ▶ **UNSCR 2139 (2014) PARAGRAPH 3**, demanding that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling
- ▶ **UNSCR 2254 (2015) PARAGRAPH 13**, demanding that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons

ENSURING JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

During war, accountability for war crimes can seem impossible. Yet the last decade has seen the trials of former presidents Slobodan Milosevic and Charles Taylor,²⁶ leaders who were previously seen as untouchable. The recent decision to create a new UN International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the collection of evidence of war crimes in Syria is to be welcomed as a step towards holding war criminals to account.²⁷

It is essential that early political agreements do not prevent justice from being achieved in the future, for example by agreeing on amnesties for certain war criminals. Because civil society plays a key role in monitoring violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and in supporting the victims of these violations, cooperation with civil society should start immediately to develop transitional justice strategies.

The creation of justice processes can also have a dramatic impact on the calculations of those committing war crimes in the present. It is critical that justice processes are advanced and the inevitability of justice is brought to life for those committing violations today.

An immediate opportunity to ensure the monitoring of rights violations is through the deployment of independent monitors across the country. While UNSC resolution 2328, adopted on 19 December 2016, required the monitoring of evacuations from Aleppo and the well-being of the civilians trapped in the city, there is an urgent need for independent monitors to be deployed to other besieged areas. Using the mandate of UNSCR 2328, Member States and the UN need to ensure a comprehensive approach to monitoring nationwide.

²⁶ In 2012 former Liberian president Charles Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes, and sentenced to life (50 years) in prison. Former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic died in custody before his trial had concluded.

²⁷ [https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2017-01-26/note-correspondents-international-impartial-and-Whereas-the-Independent-International-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-the-Syrian-Arab-Republic-\(Syria-Col\)](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2017-01-26/note-correspondents-international-impartial-and-Whereas-the-Independent-International-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-the-Syrian-Arab-Republic-(Syria-Col)) focuses on information collection and making recommendations to member states, the IIIM prepares files to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law. The IIIM has a quasi-prosecutorial function that is beyond the scope of the Syria Col mandate.



SYRIAN CHILDREN FORCED TO FLEE

SYRIAN CHILDREN FORCED TO FLEE

The Supporting Syria and the Region conference held in February 2016 in London saw donors committing to improve the provision of education and livelihoods for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Donors have performed well in terms of aid disbursed and committed for the current financial year, and some host governments have made significant policy changes. Yet much more remains unaccomplished. Critically, reforms are required in refugee-hosting countries that give refugees permission to work and become economically stable, and enable more free school places for Syrian refugees. Without these changes, there is a risk that the funding disbursed will fail to have a sustainable impact on people's lives.

For refugee children who have seen and suffered so much there may never be a return to what was normal life. But every child must have a future to look forward to. In the oppressive and difficult conditions in refugee camps and host communities, refugee children need a range of emotional, social and educational support.

I. PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

The prevalence of emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression can double in a humanitarian crisis, and people with pre-existing mental health problems are especially vulnerable.²⁸ Children who survive trauma may be left with lasting disabilities and mental health problems, with consequences for their future health and social and economic life skills. Rates of trauma can remain high after conflict, and longer-term psychological and psychosocial effects may be aggravated by a combination of the increased presence of weapons and the normalisation of violence within society. Acute exposure to violence can lead to mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety, which can persist well beyond the conflict.²⁹

Many children who have escaped the violence in Syria carry severe mental trauma from witnessing atrocities and being exposed to the violence of war. The Syrian-American Medical Society recently coined the term "human devastation syndrome" to describe the mental health of Syrian children, because their symptoms far exceed post-traumatic stress disorder.³⁰ Several types of mental, neurological and substance use disorders are consistent across the region, with severe emotional disorders (54%), including depression and anxiety, being the most common among all ages. Among children, epilepsy, intellectual and developmental disorders, and severe emotional disorders are the most common.³¹

²⁸ International Medical Corps 2015. Report: Addressing Regional Mental Health Needs and Gaps in the Context of the Syria Crisis <http://internationalmedicalcorps.org/document.doc?id=526>

²⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4630938/>

³⁰ Term created by Dr. M.K. Hamza, a neuropsychologist with the Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS)

³¹ International Medical Corps, 2015. Report: Addressing Regional Mental Health Needs and Gaps in the Context of the Syria Crisis <http://internationalmedicalcorps.org/document.doc?id=526>

The social and economic pressures brought about by the protracted crisis are also having a detrimental impact on the mental health of Syrian refugee children and their caregivers. A recent War Child UK study in several refugee and host communities found Syrian and Jordanian parents reporting at least one symptom of psychosocial distress and identifying this as an impediment to providing effective support for their children. When asked about cooperation and familial relationships, most children and parents said their relationships with family members had worsened due to the high levels of daily stress. Brothers hit their sisters more, mothers pay less attention to their children and fathers feel frustrated because they cannot work and provide for their families. One mother said, "After the crisis our lives became disorganised, and feelings of fear, depression, and sadness controlled all of our family. Our husbands are always upset about lack of work, and depressed about leaving their country."³²

With limited or no mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) capacity in existing services within countries affected by the Syrian crisis, the burden of care falls mainly on international agencies and NGOs to build and provide comprehensive services. The already underfunded humanitarian and regional development appeals do not address the scale of these complex needs. An adequate response will require both short-term and longer-term solutions. It is thus critical for donors and regional governments to focus on mental health and psychosocial support, and to implement community-based mental health care.

Children need support to recover from the trauma of the conflict and their subsequent displacement. Psychosocial support should also be delivered to parents and caregivers, supporting the maintenance and creation of safe and nurturing home environments. It is critical that this kind of support receives the necessary prioritisation in humanitarian response and financing.

II. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

A disrupted and destroyed education system can have a profound impact on a country's economy and the life chances of its people. It is estimated that in Syria the direct cost of replacing damaged, destroyed or occupied schools, lost school equipment and training replacement teachers could be £2.1 billion (\$3.2 billion).³³ Syrians who do not complete primary school education are likely to earn 32% less in their first job than those who complete secondary school, and 56% less than those who complete university.³⁴

For refugees, there are multiple barriers to education: lack of infrastructure, cost of enrolment, bullying, lack of transport, and inadequate facilities for children with disabilities. More needs to be done to get the most vulnerable and marginalised Syrian refugee children in school and learning.

In Jordan, approximately 91,000 of the 225,000 school-age Syrian children remain out of formal education. With the "Jordan Compact", agreed between Jordan and donors in February 2016, donors pledged \$700 million per year over three years to support Jordan in hosting Syrian refugees.³⁵ Under the compact, Jordan aimed to enrol an additional 50,000 Syrian children in formal education and 25,000 in an accredited non-formal learning plan.³⁶ While efforts have been made to improve access to education, only 20,000 children have so far gained newly created school spaces.

³² War Child UK, May 2015: Education and Child Protection Needs Assessment in Three Governorates of Jordan (Mafraq, Zarqa and Amman)

³³ <http://static.guim.co.uk/ni/1427711553264/Save-the-Children-Cost-of-W.pdf>

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/16/education-syrian-refugee-children-what-donors-and-host-countries-should-do>

³⁶ *ibid*

In Lebanon, almost 200,000 Syrian children between the ages of 3 and 17 are enrolled in Lebanese schools for the 2016/17 academic year, a 30% increase on the previous year. However, this accounts for less than 50% of the Syrian refugee children registered with UNHCR in Lebanon. Syrian children continue to face numerous barriers to accessing formal education. After years out of school, many Syrian children are in need of accelerated learning programmes and additional learning support in order to address education gaps and integrate at grade level.

In Iraq, displaced refugee students face similar challenges in accessing education, with teacher shortages in camps, language barriers and restricted access to age-appropriate formal education.³⁷

Donors and host countries must help prevent a lost generation by ensuring that every Syrian child benefits from quality education. This requires opening up further places in public schools, placing more emphasis on ensuring retention and achieving better learning outcomes, and addressing the worst forms of child labour. Also vital are opportunities for certified non-formal education with civil society support, which serve as a bridge to formal education as well as an alternative for those who may never be able to go to school. Donors should also urgently increase funding to support Syrians' livelihoods, including income-generating work, and to help offset refugees' school-related transportation costs.

Youth and young adults

There are limited services available to meet the multiple needs of youth in their mid to late teens. These are young adults whose education has been interrupted, who have limited livelihood opportunities and have continuing mental health needs. Teenage girls are particularly vulnerable to early marriage. Ignoring the needs of this group will have a long-term impact on the social fabric of refugee communities, which will continue once they return home to Syria.³⁸

Donors should invest in programmes that engage young adults and offer them support. War Child UK operates the Express Yourself programme to do just this.³⁹ We work with 16–25 year olds in Jordan's refugee camps. The programme offers participants opportunities to express themselves, with resources including a book club, debating group and mobile library. This provides intellectual stimulation and a space for them to discuss experiences of life in the camp, socially and emotionally. This enables them to have a voice and take an active role in decision making in the camp. The War Child UK VoiceMore programme in Jordan aims to nurture greater active participation of young people in War Child's advocacy activities and ensure their voices are at the forefront of its advocacy efforts at a local, national and international level. In doing so it ensures that young people are empowered, opinions are heard and confidence is built.

³⁷ Interview with War child staff member 27/02/17

³⁸ Interview with War child programme coordinator 22/02/17

³⁹ Warchild staff interview 27/02/17

Children should be able to enjoy childhood and concentrate on learning. Many refugee families without refugee status (and the legal permission to work) struggle to meet their own most basic needs. This can result in children being forced to work and being exposed to many dangers.

After years of displacement, refugees are exhausting their own resources and falling into poverty. In Lebanon, for example, refugee household average debt has increased while the number of people living below the poverty line has climbed from 50% to 70% since 2014. In Jordan, 90% of registered Syrian refugees in urban areas live below the poverty line, while more than 67% of refugee families have fallen into debt.⁴⁰

Refugee families in Jordan are adopting negative coping mechanisms in response to increasing economic vulnerabilities. Two-thirds of families spend more than they earn to meet their household needs, with the average expenditure being 1.6 times greater than income. Refugees' main concerns are around their ability to pay rent (79% of families) and satisfy basic food needs (60% of families), both of which become more pronounced as the years pass.⁴¹

An increasing number of households are pushing girls into early marriages, whilst a rising number of children (particularly boys) are being sent out to work in the informal labour market. There has been a four-fold increase in the number of Syrian children working since the beginning crisis, and now up to 30% of refugee children in Jordan are working. The Government of Jordan does not allow Syrian refugees to legally work in Jordan, which has become a push factor for Syrians pursuing work in the informal sector. The impact of economic stress on the wellbeing of children is profound.

A broader consideration of the refugee crisis in Jordan is child safety and protection. In a War Child UK study, more than 85% of Syrian refugee children interviewed revealed they do not feel safe at home and in the community where they live. In Irbid, most of the girls War Child UK works with report that they are not allowed to leave their homes for fear of getting harassed by young males. These girls stated that this isolation resulted in feelings of sadness and depression. With hostilities between Syrians and Jordanians there are increased levels of tension, discrimination and perceptions of 'unsafe' communities.⁴²

A critical step to increasing household security is to enable more adults to access work. All refugee-hosting countries must remove barriers preventing adult refugees from accessing decent work opportunities by addressing exploitation in the workplace, removing restrictions on legal stay and freedom of movement, scaling-up efforts to support the development of micro, small and medium sized Syrian-owned enterprises, and expanding initiatives to create jobs for both refugees and host communities.⁴³

⁴⁰ <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/3rp-regional-refugee-and-resilience-plan-2016-2017-response-syria-crisis>

⁴¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/stand-and-deliver>

⁴² War Child UK, May 2015. Education and Child Protection Needs Assessment in Three Governorates of Jordan (Mafraq, Zarqa and Amman)

⁴³ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/stand-and-deliver>



**REGIONAL CRISIS
RESPONSE: A LONG TERM
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REGIONAL CRISIS RESPONSE: A LONG TERM APPROACH IS NEEDED

SYRIA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE FUNDING SHORTFALLS IN 2016 ⁴⁴

• Syria humanitarian appeal	50.6% funded
• Education	55.7% funded
• Protection	24% funded
• Livelihoods	40.6% funded

The UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) coordinates all relief from donors to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan, working with national governments and integrating national plans with refugee communities support programmes. To date, the 3RP partners have provided substantial relief to more than two million individuals, including cash assistance, shelter and primary healthcare.

At the London Conference, donors pledged \$6 billion for 2016, and a long-term funding commitment of \$6.1 billion for 2017–20. However, this latter pledge has so far only raised \$607.9 million. This significant shortfall in committed long-term funding presents substantial challenges in planning an efficient and cost-effective aid response to this increasingly protracted crisis. Longer-term funding is essential for development responses aimed at improving the self-reliance and resilience of refugee and host communities.

In addition, donors pledged to make loans available to national governments for 2016–2020 to the amount of \$41 billion. Only 9%, or \$3.8 billion, of this total amount pledged at the London Conference has been made available. This area, important for economic recovery, job creation, and support for strained services such as education and health in host countries, requires urgent attention.

As outlined in this report, it is critical that more long-term funding is found to support the full roll-out of education and mental health / psychosocial programmes that have been neglected in the past.

⁴⁴ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/501/clusters>

SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESETTLING REFUGEES

Responsibility for hosting the vast majority of the world's child refugees falls disproportionately on Africa and Asia, with Turkey hosting the highest number of child refugees overall,⁴⁵ and Jordan and Lebanon hosting the highest density of child refugees relative to their population.⁴⁶ Lebanon's 1.1 million refugees, of which 50% are children, means that one in every five people in the country is a refugee under UNHCR's mandate. Currently, less than 3% of the Syrian refugee population has been resettled.⁴⁷ In Jordan, nearly 10% of the population is a refugee. By comparison in the United States, just 1 in 1,200 people is a refugee, and in the UK, 1 in 530.

This throws into stark relief the need to establish a more equitable system for refugee settlement globally, whereby richer countries take a fairer share of refugees. Such a system would be assisted by the establishment of more widespread and accessible avenues to seek safe and legal asylum – for example through making humanitarian visa applications more accessible for children and their families via embassies abroad.⁴⁸

Donors should follow through on multi-year aid funding as foreseen in the commitments made at the London Conference 2016. The key needs of children must be prioritised in any long-term funding commitments, particularly education and psychosocial support. All countries must also allow entry to asylum seekers fleeing violence and seeking international protection in line with their rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

REGIONAL REFUGEE DISTRIBUTION

Jordan hosts 655,833 Syrian refugees, which amounts to between 6.9- 13.2% of its total population

Lebanon hosts around 1.5 million Syrian refugees, in addition to an estimated 280,000 Palestinian refugees One in four people living in Lebanon is a refugee from Syria

Turkey hosts 2,910,281 Syrian refugees⁴⁹ with more than 90% of those living outside the 26 state-run refugee camps.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Unicef, 2016. Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Uprooted_growing_crisis_for_refugee_and_migrant_children

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ Oxfam, 2017. Where there's a will, there's a way: safe havens needed for refugees from Syria.

⁴⁸ See also Unicef's proposals at <https://blogs.unicef.org.uk/2015/09/09/refugee-migrant-children-uk-government/>

⁴⁹ UNHCR. Inter-agency information sharing portal. UNHCR.org. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224> (Accessed March 5, 2017)

⁵⁰ IOM, 2016. Migrant presence monitoring: Situation report, 2016.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Six years of brutality and bloodshed have turned Syria into the epicentre of a massive humanitarian crisis, unprecedented in its scale and impact, with ramifications reverberating around the world. The decision to title this report 'A War on Syria's Children' was not taken lightly, but the scale of the suffering inflicted on this group means it is difficult to reach any other conclusion. Yet despite this suffering, we have been struck by the scale of the international community's indifference to it. Some, but certainly not all, countries have been generous in the provision of international aid in response to the crisis. But, overall, the international community's response to the atrocities in Syria has been a collective failure. A reluctance to intervene in support of Syria's children has emboldened the conflict's belligerents to commit grave violations against their rights with impunity.

It is tempting to despair of the situation, but despair is a betrayal of the strength and spirit of ordinary Syrians who struggle every day to help their fellow country men and women. Having worked with thousands of children in the camps in Jordan and Lebanon, War Child UK has witnessed their resilience first hand. We know that, with the right support, they can recover from these experiences, and one day return to the country and help rebuild it. But they will need help and support if they are to do so. The power to end the targeting of Syria's children, to get them the support they need, to stop the fighting, and provide the resources needed to rebuild the country and invest in its children's futures, lies with the international community, particularly those states that comprise the UN Security Council. They must now exert real political, diplomatic and military influence to end the violence and suffering, and facilitate a sustainable and just peace. It is in their power to ensure that we do not have to mark yet another grim anniversary.

RIMA'S STORY



When we first came we thought it would only be for one or two weeks and then we would go home. But it wasn't one or two weeks - we have been here in the camp for approximately four and a half years now. My father was travelling elsewhere when we fled and first lived in the camp, but now he has joined us and has been here for several months. We go to a school here in the camp. Pretty much the whole of our family is studious; we want to study, we want to work hard. We want to develop as the next generation. This is our life in the camp and we must adapt to the situation. Whatever you do, you have to adapt, because this is our life now, and there is nothing we can change except by our studies only. Nothing else.

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