

# SYRIAN WOMEN: NEVER-ENDING PAIN, ENDURING HOPE



To cite this article: İHH, Syrian Women: Never-Ending Pain, Enduring Hope, 2015. Retrieved from INSAMER: link.

April 2015

## Introduction

Syrian women are going through one of the worst periods in their country's history. The burden of responsibility imposed on them all at once has caused them great difficulties. A Syrian woman who has had to abandon her homeland is now homeless when once she lived peacefully as the sultan of her own house. The women who remain in Syria and support the resistance face great threats along with their children and their families. These Syrian women are also expected to undertake new tasks and play different roles under this excess burden and difficult conditions. Women are sometimes the only responsible individuals in their families and are the only support for the survival of the other family members.

Despite this great humanitarian crisis in the country, the people still have the ability to be hopeful for the future. This is because, even if Syrian women are stricken with grief, they are going through an important process of enlightenment and consciousness in the long term. This awakening will give them a strong personality enabling them to endure the tough conditions of life and play a key role in building a new powerful generation who will create the Syria of the future, despite all the difficulties. Perhaps this vital and active role played by Syrian women is one of the key reasons why they are the target of the brutal Syrian regime. Through women, the regime tries to punish the resistance and society as a whole.

## Physical And Psychological Violence Against Women In Syria

Women in Syria have been exposed to all kinds of violence since the beginning of the revolution. With the transformation of the revolution from peaceful demonstrations to an armed struggle, it was mostly women who became the victims of the extreme oppression and violence to which the regime forces began to subject its citizens. Except for the minority groups supporting the regime, for four years the Syrian regime and its murderous supporters have been sustaining an unrelenting war against all Syrians, using all manner of non-conventional weapons against them without discriminating between women, the elderly, children or the disabled.

Even babies in their mother's wombs are not spared from this brutal war waged by the regime. When Assad's snipers targeted a pregnant woman walking down the street in Aleppo and killed the fetus in her womb in late 2013, this served as an example of the extents to which the regime would go. The unfortunate woman was left having to have surgery to remove the dead baby from her womb.

### *The Syrian Regime's Use of Violence against Women to Break the Resistance*

In Syria, women are at the forefront of the victims of war who are most affected by the oppression and brutality of the regime. This is because the regime forces systematically apply violence against Syrian women. Since the beginning of the war, women have been massacred in Syria, taken into custody, raped and used as hostages for blackmailing male relatives. Syrian women were always a target of the regime due to their active role in the revolution and their important role in society, and thus the regime has tried to use them as a psychological trump card.

### *Murders*

According to the Syrian Human Rights Watch (SHRW), the number of women killed in the country constitutes 9% of the total number of people who have lost their lives in the war. By mid-2013, 7,543 women had been massacred by the Syrian

regime. Again, a total of 2,454 children, including 257 infants under three years of age, were also killed by the regime during this period. There are at least 155 women in the country whose fate is still unknown. The high number of women who lost their lives in the massacres in Baniyas in May 2013 at the hands of the regime forces shows the extent of the genocide that targets everyone without any exception. The raids on Al-Bayda and Ras al-Nabe territories in August 2013 again turned into massacres and at least 70 women lost their lives in two villages.

Women face serious threats at any moment during the conflict between the regime forces and opponents, as well as during the regularly organized military operations. So much so that women and children are used as live shields in these operations. Paratrooper Khaled Yusuf Al-Hammoud's account is enough to understand this situation: "Because the Syrian regime forces are afraid of attacks by the Free Syrian Army and other soldiers, they force women and children to get on the tanks both during patrols and during the raids."

As a part of the armed conflict in Syria, kidnapping and detaining women is one of the most common methods used to exchange prisoners or harm someone. Despite the fact that there is no accurate and reliable information, documentation or statistics about the number of women who have been abducted and what they have gone through, it is estimated that most of the female abductions occur in the rural areas of Damascus and Homs. The most important reason for the lack of accurate statistics on this issue is that the parties carry out such operations with great confidentiality in order to safely carry out the exchange of prisoners.

### *Detention, Threats and Sexual Violence*

The SHRW states that about 4,500 Syrian women are under detention. When this figure is added to the number of convicted female prisoners, it is estimated that around 9,000 women are under threat. Nur Al-Khatib, who has been tracking the files of the women in custody for SHRW, says

that there are female prisoners belonging to the opposition group, but that this number is low: “As usual, the Syrian regime does not discriminate between women and men in their practices. Violence, abduction and the use of oppression are applied against all voices of opposition, regardless of whether it is a woman, man, or child. There is not even any difference between the torture imposed on men and women. Moreover, women are subjected to all kinds of psychological and physical assaults, as well as all kinds of insults in the police stations and places of interrogation. With their most basic needs deprived, women are also subjected to sexual harassment, sometimes reaching the level of rape, derogatory treatment, curses, and threats from male security staff.”

The ugliest and most brutal violation that women face in Syria is sexual violence in all its forms. This occurs in the form of threats of sexual harassment or rape, or actual sexual harassment and rape. Sexual violence in the country has become one of the main methods to which the Syrian regime forces frequently and systematically resort. Such disgusting acts are being resorted to in order to break the resistance and will of the people during raids, at search points, in prisons and at detention houses. Furthermore, attempts are made to wear down men regarding the sensitive issues of honor and chastity by using women and small girls in order to get revenge on the opposing party. The Assad regime tries to disseminate feelings of helplessness and despair among the people and the insurgents. Unfortunately, even small girls cannot escape from being subjected to sexual violence in the country. There are many cases where girls, some of them just nine years old, have been raped in front of their parents. Assad’s supporters are well aware that the psychological damage caused by such attacks are more effective than any destruction of the will and resistance of the people.

The SHRW points out that in 2013 alone around 6,000 women were raped, resulting in an incalculable number of unwanted pregnancies and births. The number of women who have suffered sexual assault besides rape is estimated to be 7,500. In the period preceding 2015, this figure increased

systematically and net numbers can no longer be determined due to the increasing difficulty in accessing information. Pointing out the increase in unwanted pregnancies, Nur Al-Khatib states that many women released from prison have reported falling pregnant while in custody and having an abortion once they got out.

Aside from all these acts, even pregnant women are exposed to this cruelty and torture. According to Nur Al-Khatib from the SHRW, pregnant women who have been taken under custody by the regime forces in Syria are denied any basic medical care or basic requirements such as medicine, food, and water. The SHRW has established that eight births have taken place in Homs Central Prison, while five women have given birth at Adra Central Prison. The mothers and infants face very serious health problems because of both malnutrition and unhealthy environments, as well as lack of necessary medication and medical support. For example, it has been reported that an infant died due to health issues after being born at Adra Central Prison because a guardian refused to call a specialist physician.

Founder and manager of the SHRW, Fadl Abdulgani, summarizes the difficulties faced by Syrian women: “The violence that Syrian women face is the cruelest and most brutal in contemporary history.”

Of course, this grave situation can most accurately and explicitly be described by the women who have been detained or arrested and who have suffered such painful experiences. However, they find it difficult to bring themselves to talk about these atrocities and inhumane practices. What we can learn from the women exposed to this treatment is just the tip of the iceberg.

### *Stories from the Victims*

Nora is a former detainee imprisoned by the Syrian regime. We found Nora, who was born in Homs in 1982, living as a refugee in Turkey’s Reyhanli district. Married and mother to three boys, Nora was detained for a period of 11 months after being arrested in June 2012. After she was



arrested, she was taken to the Palestine Police Station in Damascus from the Homs Central Police Station and was then brought to Damascus Adra Prison. Other places where Nora was transported during her detainment were the Air Intelligence Center in Damascus, Damascus Police Station No. 62, Damascus Police Station No. 215 and the Damascus Penal Department.

Nora was first put in front of the military court on charges of carrying weapons, and later the civilian court on different charges (prostitution, organizing demonstrations and participating in demonstrations). It was ruled that she be freed pending trial in return for a bail of 700,000 Syrian liras. Accused of participating in terrorist acts in the Damascus Penal Department, Nora was later released through a prisoner exchange.

She recounts the following about her time in the regime's prisons: "It's all very painful moments that I can't get out of my mind. It's very difficult to move on, but I praise Allah that I'm still alive. During my arrest, I was subjected to all kinds of physical and psychological torture. The most painful thing is that most of these attacks were carried out in front of my children. I passed out while I was being raped. My three-year-old son thought I was dead and he still thinks so. He thinks I am someone other than his mother. He thinks his real mother is dead. He talked to me with sign language for a long time. The rape also affected my health very badly. I had to undergo surgery due to my discomfort and this has left me with a permanent disability. During the torture, they inserted a wooden stick into my genitals. These pieces of wood were later removed through surgery."

After Nora was freed from the physical and psychological torture she had suffered in the regime prisons, she, unfortunately, did not find the sympathy and support she needed from society; "My husband's relatives avoided talking to me when I got out of jail. Only my sister would speak to me," said Nora. From this, we can clearly understand that the state of mind of women who have been raped in Syria is not taken into consideration in terms of moral conscience. There are even those

who look down on these victims and suffering women with shame and hatred. These actions, which are war crimes and crimes against humanity, are unfortunately still considered as the fault of the woman herself in the eyes of society. A woman who has been exposed to such torture is unable to undergo any treatment to recover from its effects even if she wants to because of the primitive and antiquated approach of a portion of society.

As one of the women who has been exposed to this kind of violence, Nora says the following on this subject: "The way society views women who are subjected to sexual violence is not fair at all. A woman who has been in custody or subjected to sexual violence is ostracized with humiliating and accusatory glances, even from those very close to her. I ask people to remember that Allah is all-knowing and to respect all women who have been victims of violence, and treat them fairly and justly."

However, Nora is an important example of a woman who has survived her struggle despite the torture and ill-treatment she has suffered. Her husband, who was the one most supportive to Nora, has been by her side ever since the day she was released and has not shown the attitude that other people around her have. Nora says that her husband has stood by her side despite everything and that this has played a big part in her being able to survive the trauma; "After being released from prison, my husband told me not to be ashamed of what I had gone through, and even to be proud of my struggle." When we ask her about her hopes for the future she says; "I believe in the future with the faith I have in Allah the Almighty. This is the will and discretion of Allah and there is no way to escape from it. I have to get over the psychological obstacles that have been put in front of me since my detention. The power to forget is a blessing from Allah, the Lord of the universe."

Nora talked about the kitchen where she now works and how this project has changed her life; "I work with a group of women in a kitchen making ready meals. This project helps us to break through the psychological barriers and increase our con-



fidence.” When we asked whether the revolution in Syria has had any positive effect on her life Nora said, “We are beginning to understand all those political changes that once felt like they had nothing to do with us.” Although this answer is short and simple, it contains a deep meaning and irrefutable truths. The traditional Syrian woman has long been a tool of enlightenment in this region buried in darkness. These valuable assets, formerly accused of being responsible for weakness and underdevelopment, have now assumed prestigious, humanistic and contemporary roles and are playing a leading role in rebuilding society.

Nora is one of these positive examples who has overcome the pain she has gone through. Many negative emotions can become permanently ingrained after a person becomes the victim of rape. With such a burden on their shoulders, the person can face great difficulties. A great deal of emotional disturbance can arise along with feelings of shame, humiliation, distress, confusion, anger, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In the case of Nora, it seems that there is a positive improvement in the trauma that this situation creates. One of the female activists who actively supports detained women and is taking charge of the resistance in Syria explains this as follows: “Women taken into custody are more or less affected by the trauma they experience for the rest of their lives. The extent of this depends on the limit of the woman’s tolerance and her power to cope with these troubles. She will suffer a long period of physical and mental problems after she leaves prison.

The effects of this vary from woman to woman. Even if they seem to have survived the troubles they have gone through, we can understand many of the psychological changes in these women from the behavior exhibited in their daily lives. Some are afraid to sleep in the dark as this reminds them of the feeling of loneliness and some start smoking claiming that it makes them forget what has happened.” Sexual violence and acts of intimidation are not limited to women in custody alone. The regime forces use every opportunity to impose fear in the form of various raids, massacres, rape in

front of family members, and inhumane practices. These actions that people even find hard to talk about are carried out by regime troops without the fear of God.

Within the scope of this study, we spoke to Fevziye, a woman whose family was slaughtered before her very eyes. Fevziye, born in 1969, is a widow and mother of seven girls. She lives as a refugee in Reyhanlı, Turkey, with her brother and his large family. While listening to her story, it was impossible to ignore the desolation and helplessness on her face, the extent of her suffering and her trauma. Stricken with grief, Fevziye cannot hold back her tears when recounting her story, a story that would make any listener’s blood run cold. “It was June 2012. The massacre continued for nearly four hours. It started at about 3.30pm and ended at 7 pm.

About 1,000 soldiers came with their dogs from four nearby villages (Al-Fallah, Al-Kabo, Al-Sharqillia, and Al-Aoz) and attacked us. They were fully equipped. My house was in the middle of the neighborhood that the soldiers attacked. I saw them get close to the farm, they started killing the dogs and other animals. I thought they wouldn’t come any closer to us. My husband’s family’s houses were next to each other. As soon as they entered the area, they killed nearly 170 people from my husband’s family (the Abdurraziks). The dead bodies were piled up. Women and children were also among the dead. I could see what was going on from my home which was relatively far from all the violence. Then I looked back and saw the soldiers flooding into my house. There were 24 of them. They pushed us into a corner of the house and began to beat us with their rifles. Afterwards, they raped four of my daughters and brutally killed them. The last thing I remember from this cruel and brutal massacre is a soldier pulling one of my daughters by her breast. When my daughter resisted, he hit her and raped her in front of her father. My husband was trying to stop them but he was killed with a hail of bullets. A few hours later, when I woke up, I saw that I was covered in blood down to my heels and I realized that they had raped me. They had thrown me into the pile of

my husband and daughters' bodies wearing only my torn nightdress. Obviously, the dogs thought I was dead. When I looked up, I saw my little girl staring at me her eyes full of horror and pain. At first, I didn't realize what I was doing with the shock. The tray that we were eating from before the soldiers arrived was completely covered in blood. I got up and I took the tray to the kitchen and washed it. When I came to my senses, I ran outside to call for help."

Fevziye, who is experiencing serious psychological problems, said that she is working in a hairdresser's and that she is doing her best to overcome her grief: "Nobody supported me except my brother, who is with me now and nobody reached out with a helping hand. I don't think there have been any positive changes in my life since I moved here. Whenever I remember what has happened to my family and children I just want to die. As she sobbed her heart out and our colleague tried to comfort her, Fevziye said that it brought her great heartache to speak about this trauma and that speaking about it brought all the feelings back afresh.

#### *Psycho-Social and Health Problems Experienced by Female Detainee Victims of Rape*

Women who are taken into custody and who are subjected to rape experience severe psychological disturbances. Dr. Hale Abdulhamid, head of a psychiatric center in Jordan, is responsible for the department dealing with violence and severe rights violations against women and says that the most common psychological state after such an experience is a post-traumatic disorder. This is causing the women who are subjected to such experiences to withdraw from others. Repetitive and disturbing thoughts, nightmares of the event, insomnia due to nightmares, outbursts of anger, feeling as though one is back in that moment, and an extreme sensitivity to objects and people who remind one of the events are among the most common findings in women who have been raped.

Stating that the results of psychopathology on former female detainees who have been abused are variable, Dr. Abdulhamid says, "The number

of patients who respond positively to treatment is very limited. The response will continue to be limited as long as there is no established body of specialists to engage and work with these victims. The biggest reason for this is the social stigma, which pursues them wherever they go. In addition to this, many factors prevent women from overcoming their trauma and taking a step towards a peaceful life, such as the views of family and relatives, feelings of exclusion, collective insecurity, lack of self-confidence, lack of sensitivity among male clerics and leading figures of society, and lack of long-term psychological support programs for these women."

Dr. Hale Abdulhamid tells us that a Syrian woman who has received a marriage proposal from someone who knows her history continues to suffer depression and anxiety and has attempted to commit suicide many times. What makes this situation worse in this example is that the woman fell pregnant after being raped and the fate of this baby born out of wedlock is still unknown.

Also, some Syrian families prefer to kill their daughters rather than have them face the stigma of rape and psychological depression for the rest of their life. Indeed, Syrian society is not understanding of the women or their families, regardless of the fact that they are victims or are suffering psychological damage. Although society feels a sense of pity for an abused women, it is still not possible to accept this situation in a social sense. The head of the SHRW unit working with former female detainees states that such cases are very common: "The suffering of the women who have been detained does not end after they are released. These women are victims of the regime firstly, and then become victims of a closed society which cannot accept that they have been in custody. The psychological and social dimensions of this experience remain with the woman for the rest of her life. The negative effects are far times worse for female political prisoners than they are for their male counterparts. The main reasons for this are the fundamental concepts of honor and chastity in Syrian family structure. A new process begins for a woman released from prison. In this

process, women are condemned to loneliness and have difficulties integrating back into society. Sometimes this can lead them to commit suicide. The last suicide incident was reported in Aleppo in September 2014. A woman who was raped in prison committed suicide because her family rejected her. The extent to which these women's

## Female Syrian Refugees

Asylum is one of the biggest humanitarian problems arising from the armed conflict in Syria. Because persecution does not distinguish between soldier or civilian, the guilty or the innocent. Millions of Syrians have been forced to leave their home and flee to neighboring countries. Despite discrepancies between official and unofficial figures, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of Syrian refugees in other countries, particularly Turkey, exceeded 3 million in the first three and a half years of the civil war.

However, it is not hard to guess that the real unofficial figures are well above that. Most of the refugees (at least 75%) are women and children. While the number of displaced people within the country is 6.5 million, almost half the Syrian population are now refugees. And half of these are children. Before the civil war, the population of Syria was around 23 million.

Speaking on the magnitude of the crisis, António Guterres of the UNHCR said: "We are facing a terrifying situation here. The Syrian crisis is far worse than anything we have seen for many years. This also makes the need for a political solution much more important. For the time being, supporting international humanitarian intervention is vital."

Being forced to seek refuge leaves a deep impression on Syrian women. The most important reason for this is that women make up the majority of adult refugees, are directly responsible for the care of their children, while they are left unable to meet their intimate and personal needs, which are difficult to meet under refugee conditions. Syrian women are often labeled as the term "housewife". Whether positive or negative meanings are im-

plied by this, what really matters is that Syrian women are left in shock and astonishment at what has happened to them. These women go from living in the safety of their own homes to suddenly finding themselves in tents under highly primitive conditions, and lack a man to take care of them here. Because in Syrian society men are the main providers responsible for supplying the family with basic daily necessities.

### *The Life of a Refugee*

Many women living in these camps have difficulty accessing basic everyday necessities and acclimating to camp life. Gofran, a 38-year-old woman from Idlib, is one of these. Seamstress Gofran lived a peaceful life in her home in Damascus with her husband, who was a civil servant. But when the regime began to besiege the city (between the Seyyide Zeynep/al-Hojayra neighborhood where Gofran lived), the people in these areas faced the real danger of starvation. Gofran and her husband decided to flee the city, no longer able to bear the tears of their children crying from hunger as their food supplies drained away.

At the first regime force search point, her husband, who took part in carrying the wounded during the raids and bombardment of other neighborhoods, was taken under custody on charges of terrorism. Gofran managed to get away with her seven children (the oldest is 17, the youngest 3) to reach the village of her birth.

However, unable to bear the attacks made on her village and the barrel bombs, she decided to go to Idlib's northern countryside, which was relatively safer. But there she faced a completely new tragedy: camp life. Gofran, who was condemned to live



in a nine-meter square tent with seven children, began to sell second-hand clothes in return for very little profit.

Only able to earn enough money to satisfy the hunger of her seven children, Gofren's greatest fear is the harm that could come to her daughters in this camp where many different kinds of people are present. Her greatest wish is for her daughters to marry, even if this has to be at an early age. Gofran, who complains that aside from an elementary school that is merely for show, the camp lacks a middle school or high school, also suffers from an unsafe environment where ungoverned people with guns and gangs roam in the absence of any authority in the camp. Among the main problems are the lack of infrastructure that invites all kinds of disease, the sewage waste which collects everywhere, the inability to access clean drinking water other than what is brought in tanks, which is inappropriate for use and comes from suspect sources, and the primitive tents which fail to protect them from cold weather in winter or the hot weather in summer.

Having lost her husband to the cause, Gofran's distress is increasing day by day and she looks forward to the day when she will return home. Because of life's uncertainties, her anxieties about the future of her children who cannot access education have caused her to become psychologically disturbed. Unfortunately, there is no one to save her from this spiritual, economic and social depression or at least anyone to give a helping hand. Gofran defines the civil war as a calamity both for herself and her children and says, "The war has not benefited us in any way. Our future is now completely unknown. All we can do is get through the day and wait for the dark of tomorrow to come. We no longer have the courage to think or plan for tomorrow."

Born in 1993, Amine is another Syrian refugee who has faced very difficult times. A widow with a six-month-old baby, Amine's husband died on March 22, 2014, in the Al-Sahel conflicts. Amine escaped to Antakya and lives a solitary

life here. She has no education and does not have any professional skills to help her find a job. Concerned about her baby, the young woman escaped from the town of Cebeler where she was living and took refuge in Turkey. Amine says that neither her own family nor her husband's family could help her because their financial situations were both so dire. She cannot even get enough help to meet her daily needs, such as the baby's basic necessities, housing rent, milk and winter clothes, bills for the heater, wood, and electricity, and she says that her Turkish landlord never gives her an extension for these costs. "I don't want anything beyond the basic needs for a person to survive. Can you imagine how hard it is having a baby in the house and not being able to heat it when you think about how cold it gets in Turkey?" If we consider that Amine lives in a house, it does not bear thinking what the women who have to live in tents, out in the open air, have to go through.

Of course, Amine's problems are not just about food, drink, and heating. She faces the fear of living far from her family all alone in a foreign country. She is afraid to go out alone and cannot even go to a clinic for her baby's injections without her neighbors' help. Her only desire is to earn enough money to learn and work on a craft that will not force her to leave her child alone at home or have the child entrusted to someone else to be taken care of and to earn enough money to survive.

Gofran and Amine are just two of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian women who are struggling to survive as refugees without a man to look after their families.

Meanwhile, the women living in villages in the Latakia countryside are no luckier than Gofran and Amine. We spoke to a group of women in that region. At the center of their complaints was the depressing monotonous routine that is the inevitable result of migration. A woman who says they do nothing but eat, sweep the floor and clean up says; "I want to produce something. I dream of going back to school and attending



university. But all of this is a dream. I wish there was a sewing/embroidery course or a language course in the region, but we cannot even find a book to read here.” In saying this, she is trying to express their state of mind.

When we ask another resident if there is something she would like to say, she answers; “Our houses are gone, unfortunately, we’ve lost the means to earn a living too.” Asking for help, another says, “We’ll accept anything that you can do for us, just save us from this monotony.” Obviously, meeting the food, water and medical needs of Syrian refugee women is not enough to sustain their mental health. They are longing to do something worthy and produce something, regardless of what it is. Although most of the women we meet in the region have a low level of education (there are various levels of education from illiterate to those who have studied until ninth grade but not graduated), they still yearn to work and produce something. Unfortunately, there is no option in the camps to help them make something that will contribute to their lives.

### *Child Marriage in Refugee Camps*

One of the most significant problems faced by female refugees is being forced to marry at a young age. Although there are no official statistics or definitive data to substantiate such cases, many volunteers working on social assistance projects report that child marriages are spreading rapidly among refugee women. Dr. Musaada Mahfuz, responsible for the awareness-raising project conducted by Jordan’s Mental Health Center, gives the example of the Al-Zatary Camp in Jordan in her aim to warn Syrian refugee women about the harms of early marriage. Dr. Mahfuz spends most of her time at Al-Zatary Camp and is doing a lot of work in this regard and helping to realize many social projects. These include “A Girl’s Dream”, which aims to raise awareness among young girls aged 12-16, and “Parental guidance” projects that educate parents on similar issues. These projects, in which young girls are recommended to finish their schooling and which emphasize the importance of studying for their future, also explain the negative effects that marriages made before

the age of 16 have on physical and mental health and social development.

Speaking about the reasons why child marriages happen at Al-Zatary Camp, Dr. Musaada Mahfuz stated that this was a common practice in some sections of Syrian society; “Most of the residents of this camp come from the Daraa region, where early marriages are so prevalent that the marriage of young girls is not uncommon or considered as something wrong among these people. Apart from this, taking away the pressure of financial burden is one of the important reasons for this practice. The families also want their daughters to get married as soon as possible due to frequent harassment and gossip which spreads easily in the camp, in order to get rid of the burden of responsibility. Early marriage has many negative effects at every stage of a girl’s life. The health problems that a girl will face if she gets pregnant at this age is just one of these negative effects. For example, a young woman aged 21 who had already had seven cesarean sections came to the health clinic at Al-Zatary Camp expecting another child. Most child marriages are unfortunately allowed to take place in return for a small “bride price”, or dowry. As these marriages are unregistered, the women’s rights are not protected and this can be used against the women. As the children born from these marriages are not kept on record, birth certificates cannot be issued either.”

Noting that these girls whose bodies are still growing are sold off to marry men and work as “maids” alongside their new families, Dr. Mahfouz says, “Syrian girls can face harassment even from their new family members. The few rights that they have are being completely extorted. They have difficulties serving such large families because of their young age – and if they have children, the situation is worse.”

There are males in the camp getting married 11 times or so by Mutah marriage (a one-month contracted marriage) which is frequently seen in these camps. It is reported that 60% of the marriages in Al-Zatary Camp are child marriages.

## Civilians Targeted By Regime Forces

The civilians targeted by the Syrian regime forces can be divided into several groups according to the reasons why they are a target and how much of a target they are. Accordingly, the targeted groups can be listed as follows:

**1. Families of insurgents linked to armed organizations fighting against the regime** This group, representing the extent of the resistance, are the clear target of the regime forces seeking revenge on the resistance. These innocent people, who are guilty of no crime other than being relatives of the insurgents, are exposed to countless numbers of arrests, assassinations, as well as torture and massacre. The regime specifically targets women who are regarded as symbols of honor and chastity in society and resorts to many brutal and systematic practices. The regime forces also go so far as to target entire neighborhoods if they are seen as guilty of providing shelter for or helping the insurgents.

**2. Doctors and health professionals in field hospitals who treat or help injured insurgents.** Statistical information provided by many institutions and organizations including SHRW shows that 327 health professionals lost their lives during raids and attacks carried out by the regime forces in 2013 and about 3,250 health professionals were also taken into custody in the same period. However, the certain thing is that even if this number grows by 2015, these figures will be far below the real figures. Many health workers have been forced to flee to neighboring countries after becoming targets.

**3. Those who have participated in non-military resistance activities, such as humanitarian aid, logistics, media.** Positions in these fields are often filled by women who prefer not to participate in military activities because of the high risks. However, women who are active in these relatively safer areas cannot avoid being exposed to assassination, detention and torture.

**4. Residents of sectarian conflict zones** The extent of the sect issue is also a matter of concern when

people become the target. These zones, which coexisted peacefully in the pre-war period, became the most dangerous places of all with the start of the civil war.

The majority of those facing the above-mentioned risks are women. According to the SHRW, 1.1 million people have been injured in the country in the space of three years with the number of casualties continuing to rise due to daily attacks and bombings. Women and children account for 45% of these casualties. In addition, the number of amputees and people disabled by war has also reached 120,000 during the same period (10-15%).

### *Treatment of the Injured*

Anyone who is wounded in Syria faces great difficulties and a struggle full of obstacles. This is because private and field hospitals in the country are constantly under intensive attack and bombardment. In the first three years, close to 45% of all existing hospitals were rendered unusable by bombardments and looting of equipment. This puts the wounded and patients at risk and reduces their chances of being treated. In addition, the diversity of healthcare services in the country has also diminished, as healthcare staff and employees are targeted and this section of society is fleeing Syria as a result. It is noted that general practitioners, dentists and even veterinarians are being forced to perform complex surgery for which they have no training. This naturally reduces levels of patient recovery or causes loss of life. Dr. Suhayb Idris, the responsible officer of the young volunteer branch of an aid organization named Bunyan, told us about the difficulties faced by women in need of treatment; "In the bomb attacks launched by the regime forces in early 2014, certain places, especially hospitals, were being targeted. After all these structures as well as the water and electricity networks were damaged, the insurgents began to move and carry all patient and field hospital equipment to tunnels and caves, which are not suitable at all for wounded people and patients. In the absence of essential equipment and specialist

teams, there are many vital dangers here, especially for pregnant women who go into labor.”

A great number of female casualties from many different provinces have been reported. According to the data given by the SHRW, of those injured in Idlib, about 50% are women and children (about 30% children, 20% women). A doctor in the rural region of northern Hama reported that the proportion of injured women and children has nearly reached 80%, especially after barrel bombs started to be used. This ratio is 30% in the rural areas of Latakia and 40% in Al-Hasakah. In the city of Deyr ez Zor, the number of reported casualties per day is 12, and nearly half of these people are women and children.

### *Injured Female Refugees*

The proportion of women among the wounded who are taken out of Syria and whose numbers exceed 130,000 is around 20%. These injured women mostly undergo treatment in Jordan and Turkey. According to the information provided by Abu Muslim, the director of one of the hospitals where injured women are treated, the number of injured women brought to the hospital after most air raids is about 1,100. However, many women are taken to the hospital because of different causes, especially chronic diseases. Most of the women who constitute one-fifth of the total number of wounded are brought from Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Idlib.

### *Stories of Injured Women*

In the district of Reyhanlı on the Syrian-Turkish border, we met an 18-year-old girl named Beyan who lost her leg in an air strike organized by the regime. The family had sought safety in the countryside near Aleppo, but it was here that they fell victim to a missile attack. Even though it has been over two years since the incident, the words stuck

in her throat. Beyan is studying in her last year at high school and her biggest dream is to complete her education. What is striking about this story is the dedication of Beyan’s mother. This woman works nine hours a day in a tailor’s workshop and goes to great efforts to make Beyan comfortable; she is always there for her daughter, even when she takes a bath.

Beyan was waiting in front of a bakery on December 4, 2013, when she was caught up in a missile attack. She was taken to the Horaytan Field Hospital immediately after. She was then transferred to a hospital in the city of Kilis, Turkey to undergo surgery. There doctors agreed that the gangrenous leg would have been amputated, and Beyan was quickly taken to the Research Hospital in Antakya. Her right leg was amputated and was replaced with a prosthetic leg, but Beyan says she cannot use this leg. Beyan tells us that her biggest dream is to become a heart surgeon; “I’ve always dreamed of becoming a heart surgeon and hopefully I will get there with determination and will.”

These injured Syrian women suffer in silence. Although the difficulties are well-known, the extent of what she has gone through cannot be imagined. Many women who are injured or who face permanent disability are also abandoned by their husbands. For example, a woman who lost her left eye to a bombardment was abandoned by her husband and the man took their children and disappeared. Mona, a mother of three who was born in 1991 in Reyhanlı, was injured after a missile attack targeted her home in April 2014. This young woman, who lost her right leg and was seriously injured, was also abandoned by her husband. He married another woman, left the children to her and contributes nothing to their care. This innocent woman who has been left high and dry with three children can neither get her husband’s nor her family’s support.

## **Syria’s Deserted Women**

One of the most urgent issues for women who lose their husbands or male family members who had previously run the house is the economic

difficulties they face. Considering the increasingly worsening security situation and the risks of traveling, it is not difficult to predict the diffi-



culties that women have in finding jobs and the dangers that could arise once they start working. Dr. Suheyb Idris tells us the following on this topic: “Syrian women struggle a great deal to survive in a battlefield environment where there is no life security. However, the troubles that continue to increase with every day deeply affect them both mentally and physically. Syrian women assume the responsibilities of men in this never-ending war and are trying to ensure the survival of their children, but unfortunately, they become very clear targets to be used by ill-minded people.”

The situation of the wounded women who find themselves in a foreign country and who have no one take care of them is no better than those left behind in the country. According to the UNHCR’s data, about 145,000 Syrian women manage their homes by themselves. This figure represents more than a one-fourth of the refugee women whose numbers exceed half a million. This situation is a devastating experience for many women. The greatest convenience that can be provided to these women suffering from these troubles is financial support. Dr. Oma Kandlyeva, the Jordan branch manager of an international aid organization, says the following regarding this issue: “When families run by women can receive financial support it makes a huge difference to their daily lives. This support helps the family to support itself and hinders exploitation to a great deal. The kind of abuse most female refugees in need of money are exposed to is being forced to marry at a very young age. Women who now have to make a living for themselves may marry their daughters off, even if they are underage, in order to solve their financial problems and meet the family’s needs. However, despite all of life’s hardships, most mothers resist getting into this rut and make every effort to protect their daughters from this painful experience.”

Nur is a 42-year-old Syrian mother living in Lebanon. Rejecting the idea of marrying her daughter off early, she says “God forbid! I will not marry my daughter off just to free us from financial difficulties. I’d rather gouge my eyes out and have her eat them.”

Approximately 40% of the financial aid for the refugees in Jordan is sent to the families of single women who have to run their families on their own. Female-headed households are generally ranked first in the help lists of organizations that support refugees and especially women’s organizations. Because women who are the family breadwinners are subject to all kinds of physical and mental wear and abuse in various forms. According to reports from the Institute of Services and Psycho-Social Support Education in Cairo, the risk of suffering from depression and psychological distress is higher among women who are looking after their families and trying to run the house alone.

We met a former female detainee who agreed to let us quote what she has gone through. This woman, born in 1995, lives in a country where she is seeking asylum with her four sisters and brother. Having lost her parents and home, this is what she had to say about her experiences; “I need help, we have nothing, not even a place to stay. I am 19-years-old and responsible for my five siblings. Because we have nowhere to live, we have to stay with different people every day.” At a time of her life when she should be finishing school and building a beautiful future for herself, she is instead struggling to meet the basic needs of finding a home and food for her five siblings. In fact, they are basically homeless people.

Iman is a 28-year-old Syrian widow who fled the town of Al-Numan in Idlib. She now lives in Antakya. With a 5-year-old daughter to look after, Iman’s economic situation is very bad. Before the war, she lived in Zeynebiye neighborhood in Damascus with her husband of ten years. Forced to move after being unable to bear the threats, oppression, and looting from the Shiite residents in the neighborhood any longer, Iman says, “We had a home and furniture store in Zeynebiye. The Shiites plundered our houses and shops and threatened to kill us if we didn’t leave. We were afraid and fled to Al-Ma’ra. My husband began to run a small cattle trading business there, but his debts rocketed. In the end, he was killed when a missile hit him,” she says. Iman said that she



came to Turkey because her daughter Hiba needs a prosthesis. “I came to Turkey to look for associations or foundations that would cover the expenses of this very expensive operation. Just to find money to pay for my daughter’s surgery.” Iman still has no one to help her and has also been abandoned by her husband’s family. She is attending a sewing and embroidery course and hopes to find employment in a tailor’s workshop to earn money just enough to raise her daughter.

Even if they are just looking for jobs where they can earn enough money to support themselves and their children, these Syrian women are often faced with dangers and problems. Forced to live in a foreign country and in serious need of money, they are at great risk of exploitation. Unfortunately, society’s behavior towards these women is shown to be even worse with the harassment they face in the workplace. For example, 24-year-old Beydaa

was forced to flee to Antakya from Al-Numan in Idlib after her husband was arrested. The only person who has helped Beydaa in this process is her brother, whose situation is as bad as hers. Beydaa has tried to work in many places, but could only continue this for a short time because of the harassment she encountered in the workplace. Baydaa tells us what she has been going through: “I was working at a workshop under an organization in the humanitarian aid sector and I was very happy. But I couldn’t put up with the harassment I was getting from one of the men and I quit and went to search for a job in the market. Later I got a job with a Turkish worker in a shoemaker’s, but I also suffered from unwanted attention and harassment. My boss tried to put his hand on my shoulder and I pushed it away. He said to me, “If you want to bring bread home for yourself and your children, you should get used to it, who do you think you are?” and I left the place immediately.

## Positive Effects Of The Resistance On Syrian Women

No individual should remain silent in the face of the injustice and cruelty experienced in times of great humanitarian crises. By adopting such an attitude the individual protects his/her own dignity. Starting with the first demonstration in Damascus in March 2011, Syrian women have now emerged from the status of ordinary women and have gained new roles. When the public poured out onto the streets to demand their rights and freedoms, all the members of the family were involved. The women of Syria have shown great heroism throughout the resistance in Syria, made important contributions to this process and supported the resistance with great sacrifice. In Syria, women are struggling at their husbands’ sides. Because failing to support one’s husband in his struggle against cruelty is not an attitude that matches the concept of being a spouse. Women who think they have done nothing in their own world have actually begun doing the greatest job of supporting their husbands. Syrian women have changed the image of women as passive female figurines in Arab societies, and believing that surrendering was not an option, accepted the role that should be taken uncondi-

tionally. This, in spite of all the difficulties faced, has made the women of Syria more decisive and unshakable. A woman who suddenly becomes the only provider for her family cannot allow herself to be defeated by life. Refusing to be defeated and compelled to struggle on, these women are beginning to overcome all their fears. The Syrian woman has now taken her place at the forefront of society and is in the perfect position to help those who have been subjected to all kinds of systematic persecution and oppression for decades and whose rights have been seized.

Stating that the Syrian resistance’s determination originated from the persistence of women Farah Al-Atasy says the following; “An example of this is that women are involved in all stages of resistance. Women took an active role in the demonstrations and actions from day one. Women’s roles have also changed with the transformation of the resistance into an armed struggle. Women are now the principal heroes of the resistance providing medical assistance, and logistical and moral support to the men on the frontlines. The Syrian women who have participated in the very

heat of battle have been responsible for some great success stories.”

Lubabe Tayfour, an activist from the Syrian Women’s Union who refers to the contribution that the Syrian resistance and women, in particular, have made to social change, draws attention to the positive and negative effects the war has had on Syrian women’s lives, disposition, duties, and responsibilities and says the following: “Media organizations and researchers are more focused on the political and humanitarian extent of the Syrian crisis. However, studies on the social status of a Syrian woman who has undergone drastic changes in many areas can also be carried out. Giving women the value they deserve is of great importance for the development of society. Despite the conservative attitude of the Syrian community towards women, Syrian women have begun to break down these chains and participate in resistance at every stage since day one when the peaceful demonstrations began. Women who participated in the demonstrations side-by-side with men, even leading and pioneering women, then rushed to the aid of the wounded, materially and spiritually supported the armed struggle and have sometimes participated in the war by wearing arms. This participation has given Syrian women a social status they did not have before. Women can now participate freely and fearlessly in social events. This change has begun to affect women’s social lives and family structures in different areas. The Syrian women who adopt humanitarian and national duties are participating in the resistance with all their hearts and souls. Participating in peaceful demonstrations, expressing demands for freedom and justice in every field, extending a helping hand to orphans and needy families, and intervening and helping wounded people can be listed among the new tasks of Syrian women. However, this situation has also revealed another fact. Many Syrian men have found it unacceptable for women to participate in such activities where they leave their homes, children, and families behind. This has led to the disintegration of the families of many women involved in the resistance.”

Referring to the chaos of revolutionary society and to the effect this situation has had on women, Lubabe Tayfour says; “The most dangerous side effect of the revolution is the chaotic atmosphere that it has caused in society and the uncontrolled, unplanned changes that it has lead to. The main feature of the Syrian resistance is that it is a spontaneous revolt for freedom and human dignity. There was nobody leading this civil riot. In this process and in the stages that follow, the chaotic environment, especially the social chaos, will continue for a long time. Members of the clergy and scholars have a huge responsibility in helping overcome these difficulties as their opinions are respected by society. Their duty is to remind people of the rules of Islam and of universal human and moral values. In the forthcoming period in general, women’s participation in social life should be accepted within the limits set by Islam. When I say the limits of Islam, what I mean is, not those traditions and customs which are forbidden by Islam, but rather the rights, responsibilities, religious and moral obligations of women that Islam and the Holy Quran have clearly outlined.”

The parties active in the resistance in Syria also point to the important role of Syrian women in the resistance. When we asked Bunyan’s Dr. Suhayb Idris about the participation and role of women in the Syrian resistance, he said; “Despite the security problems and the conditions that are particularly severe for women, Syrian women have been actively involved in all phases of the revolution, struggling with all kinds of difficulties and sacrificing their souls.” However, a conservative segment of Syrian society still has difficulty in accepting a woman’s defensive role in the resistance. Especially in the city of Aleppo, women’s support for resistance has been limited due to hard times and security problems. Unfortunately, the threat of being randomly arrested and raped is a major obstacle to women’s more effective participation in the resistance. However, despite everything, many women who actively participated in demonstrations and actions from the first day also actively participated on the battlefield alongside men when the resistance transformed into an armed struggle, providing medical first

aid, in addition to providing logistical and moral support to the men on the frontlines. The insurgents fighting for a free Syria today say that they would not be able to show such resolve if it weren't for the determination of these women and that they would not have been able to keep going for the past four years without them.

### *The Syrian Resistance and Women's Struggle*

Syrian women have received their share of all the negative aspects of the war. The number of women who have been killed, injured, taken into custody, lost, abducted, raped, or forced to live as refugees under hard conditions is no less than that of men. However, the Syrian women who found themselves on the battlefields never retreated, despite all the difficulties. There are many striking examples of patience and the survival instinct in Syria that provide a great source of inspiration. Through this revolution the people of Syria and especially women have put their name to moral achievements that take years to be acquired. The payoff from this will be reflected on future generations. The achievements of these Syrian women who have paid such a high price for their honorable struggle can be listed as follows:

1. Despite levels being insufficient, Syrian women have succeeded in entering politics. It is now possible to see women within the opposing party. The National Coalition and the Syrian National Council are included in this.
2. Taking part in social life and freeing themselves from the shackles of passivity and silence, Syrian women are now actively using visual, written and social media. Women who participate in charitable work have begun to make many contributions in a wide range of areas from health to education. Syrian women have now become the "soft power" of the revolution.
3. One of the most important gains the resistance has given women is their conscious awakening. The historical price of suffering and pain paid by these women to gain this consciousness will save future generations from illiteracy and darkness. Because women are mirrors of society.

4. Syrian women have become the dominant spouse in the economic balance of the family. This situation has put a great weight of responsibilities on their shoulders. Apart from the responsibilities of the household, making a living for the family and meeting their basic needs are other burdens they have to bear. The state of war within the country and the refugee status they face outside adds layer upon layer to their difficulties and these negative conditions increase their problems and responsibilities. The women of this country going through such dark days are obliged to be strong, to be conscious of the burden on their shoulders and their responsibility to their families. This is what strengthens the position of women within society.

5. Syrian women have become leaders in many fields. Syria has now female political representation. In addition to this, there are many women coming to the fore in many areas from social life to education and health, from economic activities to awareness-raising activities. Many women's organizations and associations that are currently working their fingers to the bones will take their place in the political and social map of Syria after the war is over.

6. Women are breaking the stereotypes and prejudices that they are inadequate and incompetent in many areas of life. Traditionally, women in Syria are considered to be weaker and more inadequate than men, as is the common opinion in Arab societies. However, in the ongoing revolutionary process, the role that women have played in Syria has almost automatically freed them of the judgments of a society that previously put women down and decreased their value.

### *Syrian Women's Success Stories*

There are many stories that prove that a Syrian woman can succeed despite all the pain and difficulties she has suffered and that she can get through anything. In this section, we will look at some real-life success stories of exceptional Syrian women who have been successful despite all the pain and suffering they have experienced.





Born in 1965, Lema is a former prisoner of the Assad regime who spent years locked away. Lema, who was arrested during the reign of Hafiz Assad, talks about her life in those days (1981-1989): “During my first period of detention, I was subjected to torture through beatings, electric shocks, being locked in a cabinet, and the flying carpet (a method of torture whereby the detainee is beaten while being tied up by their arms and legs). At that time, all female prisoners were also subjected to severe sexual violence.”

However, the anguish that Lema suffered did not prevent her from moving on with her life after she was released and from being successful. After completing her education and graduating with a law degree, this heroic woman passed the bar and carved out a career for herself as a lawyer until she had to leave Syria when the revolution began. To those who ask how she overcame her horrific past, she answers, “Obviously, the long years of imprisonment and dark nights have taught me to be stronger, more positive and more patient with my suffering. When I think back to those years, I feel like those were black clouds that have now drifted away.” When the resistance started, she had to flee abroad fearing for her life and that of her daughter. Lema is the only person taking care of her family and has not heard from her husband for about a year and a half. Nevertheless, refusing to be defeated by the challenges of life, Lema is currently serving as Chief File Clerk for the Syrian Women’s Union, helping women currently in custody.

Meanwhile, there are many mothers of fallen soldiers in Syria who have made history with their courage and enduring pain. These sons who died defending the welfare, honor, freedom, and lands of the people, left behind beloved women whose hearts are broken, who feel the pain as if it were only yesterday, but who are still standing, patient and have faith.

Um Muntasir is a mother of four boys, one of whom died in the armed conflicts. She is no stranger to the cruelty applied by the regime. Her father was arrested in the 1980s and was detained in prison for

many years. A chemistry graduate, Um Muntasir is one of the strong, educated, knowledgeable and politically aware women who have been able to cope with all the difficulties thrown at her. Her greatest motivation is to do everything she can for the families of those who have been killed in the war. This led her to establish a needle crafting workshop. We talked to her about the workshop in Reyhanlı and she told us what she has gone through: “I got the idea to set up a workshop after my son Muntasir died. A quarter of the money we earn here at this workshop, which started as a social assistance project with the support of one of my son’s friends, is donated to families of the fallen. The most important thing I’ve learned in life is that we all need to work towards ensuring that nobody is in need and no-one is a burden on others. I have never lost my faith and trust in Allah and His justice. This project, in my opinion, is an ummah (Islamic community) project.”

Saying that development projects like this are very important and useful in alleviating the tragedy of the people of Syria, Um Muntasir wants to support such social development projects that can help people who have suffered the damages of war by calling out to everyone affected both in the country and outside the country.

As we mentioned earlier, Syrian women face a serious struggle for existence from the moment they become refugees. But in the face of this, many women have proved to be examples of success, survival and achievement in life, refusing to surrender. These achievements, which others may consider minor or simple, protect their mental state from feelings of defeat, strengthen their faith and patience.

They might not be something that women with normal life experience who have not encountered difficulties in their lives could do.

Sena is a 26-year-old single woman. After her home was destroyed by the regime forces, she fled from the Hama countryside (Al-Latamna) to the refugee camps in the countryside to the north of Idlib. She lives in a tent here with her mother, father and six siblings. Sena, who was



born disabled with a missing hand, has a positive and hopeful view of life despite her disability and the difficulties she has gone through. Unlike other women in the camp who usually complain about camp life and list their needs, she answers our questions with total optimism and positivity.

Sena tells us that she leads a simple life and is lucky that her parents are healthy. She says that they are not too unfamiliar with the current conditions and tells us about the day-to-day chores she is getting used to doing. When we ask about the difficulties she has had and how she feels about the sewing workshop where she works, she says that at first she was embarrassed due her disability and kept her arm under her coat, but that as she started to become one of the most successful students in the workshop, her self-esteem increased and she became proud of herself. The woman whose peace and happiness can be seen in her eyes wants to get herself a sewing machine at the end of her training. When we ask if she is worried about the future, she answers; “I’m not afraid of anything as long as my parents are alive.” When we ask her if she is sure, we receive the answer “Allah is with me!” Sena is a deeply religious person with a simple view on life. Our colleague who carried out these interviews said the following; “Sena was the one who really amazed me. I’ve never seen anyone else so at peace with the world. A beautiful, mindful young girl who does not allow simple obstacles to darken her life.”

Willing to improve themselves and actively help those around them, Syrian women are keen to attend various courses, training seminars and similar activities that will provide them with new skills. Reem Al-Hammoud is a 20-year-old young woman. She suffered a lot in Syria. The most serious trauma that she lives with is the injury she received from a nail bomb. When we ask Reem, who has not lost her strength to struggle on despite the unsuccessful surgeries she has undergone, what she has gained from her hardships, she says, “God has given me the patience to be strong, to help people, and to be able to cope through the hard times. I attended an English course and gained some professional experience. Now I can con-

tribute to my family and the household budget.” Women of Reem’s age are usually not as calm and sober as she is. Her painful experiences and tragic life have made her a much more mature and mindful person than her peers, despite her young age. When we ask how she rises to challenge in the face of all these troubles and difficulties, she says “By being patient, accepting the will of God, and through my family and my love for them. I always keep in mind God’s words: ‘Bless those who are patient!’” Reem’s biggest dream is to complete her education and establish a women’s rights association that will help women, especially in cultural matters.

The women of Syria are exhibiting the most vibrant examples of self-sacrifice and courage. Their courage is not only limited to armed conflicts and military operations. They have to have the courage and endurance of a military leader to adapt to everyday life and to survive. Suhayb Idris tells us another example of this: “Um Al-Joud was a 21-year-old English language and literature student. She acted as a liaison between a charity for orphans and its benefactors. Through her work, she helped about 1,200 orphans. She was so passionate about this work that it started to have an effect on her grades, so she was forced to give up school. She dedicated over half her time to this cause. However, she was injured by a barrel bomb in the Al-Shiar neighborhood and she had to leave Aleppo and her beloved orphans behind.”

Um Firas is a 55-year-old social aid officer. She does not have much money but she has plenty of time on her hands and a great amount of love to give. She works for a charity program that organizes daily visits to needy families. Although she often faces the danger of death, this does not deter her and she sets off every day to provide support to the insurgents, families and the elderly and children in particular.

Syrian women are making all kinds of sacrifices to ensure their children receive an education. In one example a conscionable woman in Aleppo was working tirelessly to establish a school that would serve as a model for the rebel zone. This



courageous woman, who lived in the district under the control of the regime forces, traveled bravely and heroically between the two districts carrying aid, something which many men would not dare to do. In the end, she was put on the regime's wanted list, and had to flee from the rebel zone with her family. However, the school that was the vision of this wonderful person, saw its first class graduate last year in the rebel zone.

Un Ahmed, who has been actively involved in charity work in Hama since the first year of the

resistance, worked as a volunteer in hospitals to help the injured. Despite having suffered considerably herself, Ahmed contributed to the survival of many wounded people through her struggle and studies. She told us that she was forced to sew up many wounds with a sewing needle and black thread and often witnessed soldiers killed first-hand. This woman, who continues her work and generous contributions, has managed to survive in the face of all kinds of difficulties, despite all the death she has seen.

## Proposed Solutions To Support Syrian Women

Syria's women will play the biggest role in building the future of the country and therefore need effective and sustained support. Because of this, improving both the women's and Syrian society's social consciousness is of great importance. We need to work with expert sociologists and psychologists to ensure that women have a role and importance within society and boost their self-confidence, while also organizing projects that will rid society of its negative views on women. Some of the work that can be done in this respect is as follows:

- Special projects can be prepared that will give women who are socially aware, productive and have strong leadership skills in society experience in leading and allow them to make use of their talents.
- Syrian women need an effective way to develop their talents in line with the requirements of modern society and to strengthen their economic survival skills, hence they need effective guidance in this area. There are various activities that can be performed in this respect. For example, workshops on sewing, embroidery and other handicrafts, and computer and foreign language courses will give women the skills to be self-sufficient and valuable within society.
- Women's awareness of the importance of education needs to be raised and support needs to be provided in this area. In the new

special and central position occupied by the post-revolutionary Syrian woman, education is at the top of the agenda. Syrian women now have to be aware of and try to understand the developments around them and around the world. This great task that has been placed on the shoulders of women needs to be shaped in an academic way. Because providing educational support to Syrian women means supporting both women and society as a whole.

- Women should be supported by special programs to raise awareness in the fields of health and psychological support, as well as subjects related to the law and their rights.
- Preventing over-concentration in one area by ensuring women work in a diverse area of topics, and setting up women's associations will be an important step in building the society of the future.
- Collective activities and rehabilitation work should be carried out to help former female detainees who have suffered trauma to adapt to their new lives.
- Work must be carried out to ensure that women who are taken into custody and/or have been raped are provided with jobs/professions to help them survive the destructive effects of these painful experiences and to give them hope for the future.

- In order to reduce suicides, the families of women who have been taken into custody and/or raped need to be made aware of the effects the painful experience has on the women and to be shown how to embrace them back into the family.
- It is now more important than ever that Syrian women develop themselves. The easiest way to achieve this development, which lies behind every successful society, is through

organized development courses aimed at increasing motivation, persistence and the sense of self-hood. Such courses will give rise to positive changes in people's lives when provided by specialists.

- Various women's groups and organizations from Turkey should combine their strengths to overcome problems by cooperating more closely with Syrian women's organizations.

## Conclusion

- Women in Syria have been exposed to all kinds of violence since the beginning of the resistance. The war, unfortunately, continues with the indiscriminate murder of both soldiers and civilians, of both men and women.
- Women who are arrested or sexually abused are exposed to social violence resulting from the lack of support in Syrian society. The tendency to exclude, reject, marginalize and isolate these women makes life even more difficult for them.
- The issue of Syrian refugees alone has become a huge humanitarian crisis. The problems encountered in everyday life and the negative views, attitudes, and behaviors of people in the host cities and countries make the women's lives even harder.
- Syrian women are at constant risk of death and injury because of the conflicts between the regime forces and different armed groups. But another danger that awaits women who cannot receive treatment due to security risks

or whose treatment cannot be completed is the poor economic situation and lack of means in hospitals.

- Those Syrian women who are left to fend for themselves are having great difficulty meeting their daily needs. For women with young children, making a living is particularly hard and grueling. These women are exposed to abusive behavior and exploitation when looking for a job and are usually employed in return for very little pay.
- Despite the hardships and difficulties they have experienced during the revolution, Syrian women have been responsible for many success stories. The women who are able to overcome suffering and pain, build the foundations of a hopeful future, and succeed in solving their problems are now having a say in different positions in society with the social, cultural and political identity that the resistance vests in them and are playing an effective role in every level.

