

## **Saving Syria and Its Children**

On February 10, the children at the United Nations' Turaan school in Muzeirib, Syria, were among an ever shrinking group of kids still able to attend school, amid a conflict that has driven three million students away from classrooms. But then reality, in the form of an explosion reportedly from an air-to-ground strike, ripped through the windows and changed their lives forever.

Forty school children were injured that day, in an incident that garnered few headlines. Eight days later on February 18, another explosion struck a school in Muzeirib, killing five school children and 13 adults, and maiming 20 more.

These grim stories are the result of Bashar al-Asad's refusal to heed the call of the Syrian people to step down. His regime's campaign of horror conducted over the last three years is bankrolled and supported by Iran, Hizballah, and Russia. And, the regime has fostered the growth of violent extremists who also threaten Syria's future.

The numbers of children affected in Syria are hard to conceptualize. Approximately three million of Syria's children have been out of school since the beginning of the conflict. More than 10,000 kids have been killed. Of the more than 2.5 million Syrian refugees, half are children. Imagine entire cities full of children and their families needing food, shelter, warmth, and attention to their emotional and physical wounds—not to mention their basic education.

A U.N. report released in January laid out the severity of the crisis. Syria's children have been sexually abused, tortured, recruited to fight, and used as civilian shields. They have also endured a range of "acts tantamount to torture," including "beatings with metal cables, whips, and wooden and metal batons; electric shocks, including to the genitals; the ripping out of fingernails and toenails; sexual violence, including rape or threats of rape; mock executions; cigarette burns; sleep deprivation; solitary confinement; and exposure to the torture of relatives."

Thousands will commemorate the three-year anniversary of the Syrian crisis on March 15, in solidarity with the people of Syria. Many fear, however, that there has not been enough attention focused on the atrocities taking place in Syria and the urgent need to achieve a political settlement. Here are several reasons to increase awareness around the world of the Syria crisis and encourage individuals to become part of the movement to help save Syria's children:

- 1) Within Syria, international assistance is supporting heroic aid workers, nearly all Syrian, to keep millions of people alive, deliver food and water, operate

schools, and arrange care for those with physical and emotional wounds. The aid that governments and individuals are providing is making a profound difference in the midst of this destruction.

- 2) International aid helps the countries neighboring Syria that are generously hosting millions of refugees. Tensions are rising as these societies struggle to accommodate so many vulnerable people. These countries need help to ensure there are enough hospital beds and school desks to support the large number of refugees.
- 3) Syria's children and youth – the future leaders of what we hope will be a stable, inclusive, and democratic country – cannot afford to be overlooked. This is why the United States government supports the *No Lost Generation* initiative. It is also why we are urging you to spend a few moments today to become a champion of Syria's children by visiting [championthechildrenofsyria.org](http://championthechildrenofsyria.org) and following #ChildrenofSyria on Twitter.

The United States is deeply concerned about the needs of children in conflict and adversity. As the largest single donor nation to the Syria crisis, the United States has provided more than \$1.7 billion in humanitarian assistance to support these critical efforts since the start of the crisis. This is in addition to the millions in U.S. bilateral assistance to support communities hosting refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

But much more should be done. Aid organizations need more support. It is not too late to make a difference. Anyone can be a part of the movement to help save a generation of Syria's children. Why not you?