

Syrian Mothers

«Testimonies»

Syrian Mothers

**Edited by: the Syrian League for Citizenship
& Besme International Group for Humanitarian Assistance**

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With

Besme International Group for Humanitarian Assistance

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About the book

This book honestly and sincerely presents excerpts of long interviews with women whose names are stated as they desired. Thus, these interviewees are quoted without any modification except for honest linguistic editing. In many interviews, we have preferred to keep the colloquial language where standard Arabic would have affected the essence of the talk.

These testifying women were interviewed where they live. Their photos were also taken in surroundings of their choice except for the photos on pages (16-20-64-88). These were taken of friends of testifying women who refused to be photographed due to being conservative or afraid.

Besme International Group for Humanitarian Assistance is an independent NGO that does not belong to any political or religious entity. It works indiscriminately with all society groups on sustainable human rights projects.

Besme projects specifically target women, children and youths.

Besme's vision is to draw smiles on people's faces through promoting a quality life that suits and respects humans' dignity based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Besme's participation in these testimonies is a sincere expression of its staff's total solidarity with distressed Syrian mothers and a stand of appreciation and respect of their endurance in the face of the current horrors.

Why Syrian mothers?

Syrian mothers are more than women. They have become a homeland since the homeland was wounded. They are life in the face of death and hope in the face of prevailing disappointment.

These live testimonies will resound forever. They are coming from pure hearts sharing ache and sadness, swinging between pain and hope and waiting for beloved ones and for the homeland to return.

Dear Syrian mothers, you are our hope of building peace, spreading the culture of human rights instead of that of death and violence and overcoming difficulties and ordeals.

With you, my ladies, the scent of jasmine will prevail over the smell of fire and gunpowder and a new dawn will be born.

**General Manager of
Besme International Group for Humanitarian Assistance
Gulshan Saglam**

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) recognized the specific impact of armed conflicts on women and the need to include women, as stakeholders, in conflict prevention and resolution. The UNSC has also issued several woman-related resolutions including Resolution No. 1325 and its relevant resolutions and Resolution 2122. Through these resolutions, the UNSC has stressed the need for considering women's particularity and involving them in security maintenance and peace-building especially in conflict-torn areas. Furthermore, it has emphasized the representation of women living in conflict-torn communities to engage them in settlement processes and all decision-making levels as equal partners to prevent and resolve conflicts and achieve sustainable peace.

The Syrian League for Citizenship believes that documenting Syrian mothers' testimonies through images and words is part of the peace-building and reconciliation process under accountability.

Each individual in society has their own intimate memory, but such memories are not purely individual. Memories are associated with the collective history that affects a whole group as much as they are necessarily associated with each individual's own social systems.

Armed conflicts that affect each and every one, like the current conflict in Syria, generate memories in each individual. No one can claim to be unaffected by them. However, since armed conflicts are an all-encompassing evil, private memories become a collective memory for all people.

In armed conflicts, mothers tend to have wounded memories that do not heal. Such memories are as unique as mothers' pain and as deep as their dignity of which they are proud. This is manifest in their faces and between their words.

This book is trying exactly to communicate, through images, the pain engraved in their faces and, through words, their underlying modest pride. It is also trying on the top of all to let the world hear Syrian mothers' cry: *Stop the war!*

Hassan Abbas
the Syrian League for Citizenship

Enough Agony



Adiba Khalil
(Al-Hasakeh)

I am a mother of eight children: 5 girls and 3 boys. I loved them more than life itself. They used to be in school but due to our difficult financial circumstances, they had to quit and work in construction.

One day, my middle son Khalil told me he had decided to participate in the battle against Al-Nusra Front. I tried to stop him but he would not listen. When he came in a leave, I would bathe him and feed him like a child.

While leaving after his last break, he turned to me and said: "Pray for me mom" and then he turned again and smiled. I was paranoid from his actions and I felt ache in my heart. One hour later, we heard the sound of clashes and immediately knew that Khalil was injured. I ran to the hospital and I felt it in my gut that something serious had happened.

A while later, my oldest son Nidal informed me he wanted to replace his brother Khalil in fighting. I begged him not to go but he left before I was able to see him. I went to the hospital to my injured son, I cried, kissed his hands and feet and begged him not to die. He woke up for a couple of moments and called my name, I knelt down next to him and told him: "I'm here, I'll give you my soul, and I'll be your sacrifice" and I held his hands and kissed him.

Three months later, Nidal told me that he is going to fight in Ras Al Ain. I wiped his hair already wet with my tears, gave him a warm jacket and asked God to protect him. He was laughing and repeating: "martyrs don not die". In following morning, my husband and his brother walked into Khalil's room angrily, and I felt my heart

«I knew he had died hungry»

stopping. I asked him what was wrong and he told me that Nidal was killed and our third son is also injured.

I left the hospital screaming madly. I hit my head against the walls and screamed: "what have I done God? My son is a martyr and his two brothers are wounded!".

We did not receive Nidal's body for burial. One year later, his corpse arrived at the hospital. It was the first thing I saw when I arrived there, but I only recognized him from his jacket. I hugged him. His hand was gripping a sealed can of meat, and I knew he had died hungry. I cried.

My life is over with my sons, but I'm trying to stay alive for the rest.

I ask God to stop this war and stop the mothers' tears.

Enough agony.

The Prison Is Not
Disgrace



Um Ahmad
(Al-Midan)

I am called Um Ahmad though I do not have a son named Ahmad. God has not blessed me with boys. However, I have two girls who are worth a hundred boys.

My older daughter joined a nursing school and refused to wear Hijab. Before her father passed away, he used to joke with her that this is disgrace and she should put cover her head, and she would answer: "it is disgrace when someone does something shameful, father". Her dad was open-minded unlike his siblings who boycotted us because our daughters did not wear Hijab.

When the revolution started, my daughter changed. She started going out, dressed up with full makeup.

I thought she was in love so I did not interfere. She started spending more time in her room whispering with her sister about things I did not understand. When going out, she would carry a pouch instead of a bag, and new friends from Sweida and the coastal region started visiting them.

The protests reached our neighborhood and I did not prevent them from participating because freedom is expensive and the repression that we've been living in for the past 40 years has to end. What did those kids in Daraa do? What is the guilt of those young men and women who are dying or being detained?

One day, I asked my daughters what was happening and the older one told me they were buying medicine and smuggling it to the protestors. The make-up was to facilitate crossing the checkpoints because soldiers do not suspect a made-up girl. We laughed so much that day but fear started eating me from the inside.

«They did nothing wrong!»

The following day, the younger daughter returned home late with a lawyer and told me that her sister had been arrested from work. The lawyer tried to reassure me but a mother's heart can never be reassured. Now, she has been in detention for three years. I visited all security branches and paid many bribes but in vain. My husband's family started pressuring him to wed the younger daughter. They said this is to avoid her being disgraced like her sister. I told them prison is not disgrace. My daughter will come out of prison feeling proud.

I'm still waiting for the happy ending for my daughter and for many more like her to return to their mother's laps. They did nothing wrong! They were detained just because they demanded what we have always dreamed of: free Syria and free Syrian people.

Soon, when the war ends, we will go back and build our country all together; Sunni, Druze, Christian, Alawi and Kurdish. We are all Syrians and it our duty to protect Syria and reconstruct it.

Nothing, nothing



Um Ahmad
(Daraya)

Before the revolution, we had led an easy life in Daraya. My son had a house and a car and we did not lack anything. When we heard about the kids of Daraa, we felt alarmed. Our children had started protesting and just like any mother, I was scared for my children, but they were protesting for our dignity.

One day, the security forces arrested my first son and killed him under torture a few days later. I never imagined they would treat peaceful protestors with such cruelty and brutality.

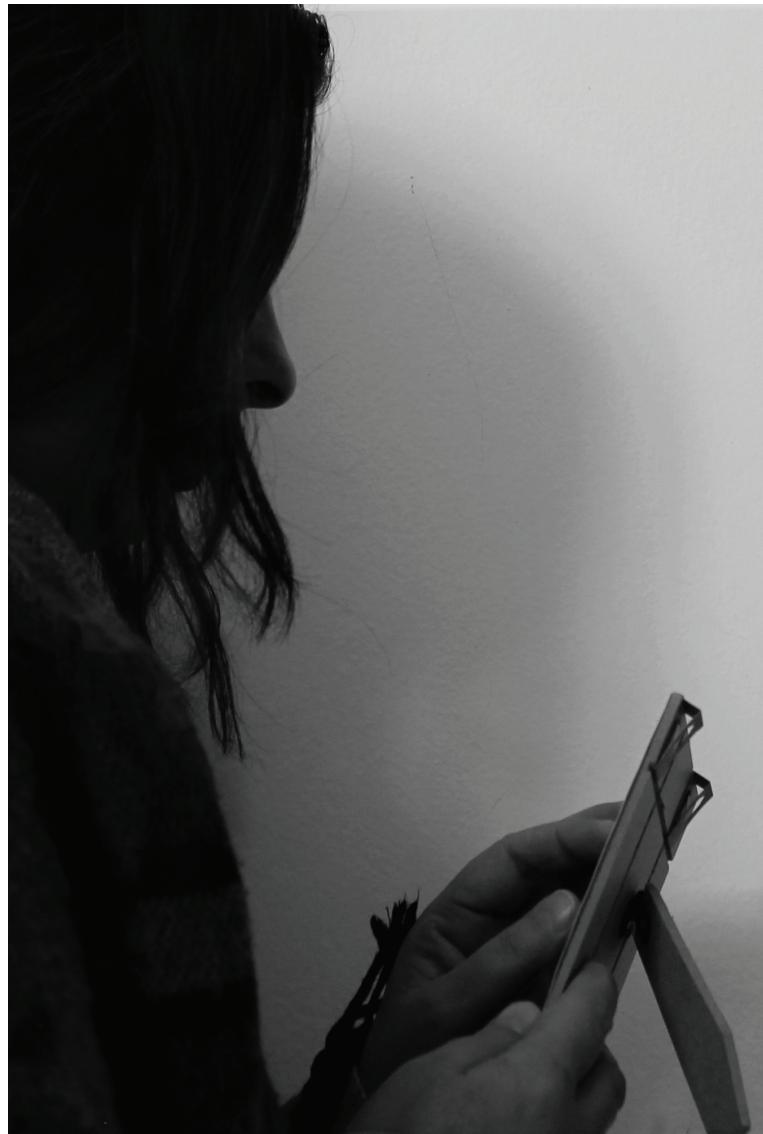
My second son was arrested in front of our house, and it took us three years to know his whereabouts. I'm now allowed to visit him once every two months, but only for five minutes and from behind thick bars.

Two years ago, a group of security men broke into our house. They beat my husband and me, searched through the entire house and took all the valuables like gold, money and cellphones. They also arrested my third son after beating him. They told me that he would come back within two hours. Now, two years have passed and I know nothing about his whereabouts. Is he alive? Is he dead? We know nothing... nothing!

I have hope the revolution will be victorious and just then, the anger and hatred will disappear from the Syrians' hearts. We will forgive after we hold the people who humiliated us and killed our children accountable. I do not hold revenge in my heart. I simply hope that Syria will live in dignity and peace in the future and that Syrians will get treated like human beings.

«Is he alive? Is he dead?
We know nothing»

Why?



Um Jaafar
(Latakia)

I'm from rural Latakia. My husband is illiterate and works in construction. I studied until secondary school. I loved education and science, and I still read my kids' magazines and books. I worked hard to ensure all my kids proper education, but Jaafar was the only one to enter the university and I was proud of him.

He fell in love with a Sunni girl from Aleppo and proposed to her. I promised him the most beautiful wedding once they had graduated and this was exactly what happened.

By the end of 2011, Jaafar joined the military service. He wanted to finish it and then continue his postgraduate education to get a PhD. Unfortunately, when he finished, they held him there. He started getting scared with the increase of violence and blood. He used to stay informed about the revolution events and would condemn the violence: "a change is necessary and they do need to improve the country but not by shedding blood".

One day, a friend of his was arrested and died under torture. Jaafar sobbed like a child. He became sadder and angrier with the increasing number of martyrs around us.

On his last leave, he looked pale and feeble. His smile faded and he became touchy. When he left, we all cried. We did not hear from him for weeks. Then, an officer from his division came and spoke to my husband alone. When I served the coffee, I overheard my husband screaming and cursing: "this poor creature, where did you take him? Where is he?" However, when he saw me shaking, he took the coffee tray, let me sit down and said: "you are a faithful woman, and this is God's will".

I'm not happy to be called "martyr's mother"

I felt paralyzed and felt more angry than sad at that moment. Why? Why did my son sacrifice his life? Why does his bride have to suffer? No one has a convincing answer?

I ask God to end this tragedy because we are tired. Our eyes are tired from crying, and I hope this tragedy will end for all the broken hearted mothers who lost their kids, husbands and homes.

I'm not happy to be called "martyr's mother". Like all mothers in Syria, I would rather that he and his friends stayed alive.

We need peace and that all young men return home to their families.

Syria is a mother who is losing her children every day.

This Is Our Story



Um Hasan
(Irbin)

In 2013, I left my house in Ghouta. Until then, my family and I had lived happily in a comfortable house and thanks God we did not lack anything. My husband used to work in trade. We owned lands and houses. Suddenly, there were no jobs. We used up all our savings. Prices increased a lot, so my husband decided to work as a driver to make ends meet. I got very scared because of the high risk facing anyone leaving his home at the time; risk of being detained or being hit by shelling. My husband' first trip ended safely, but in the second, he went and never returned.

People used to participate in the demonstrations but my husband had never done so because he cared about us; if something happened to him, we wouldn't be able to make a living. Seven months later, a relative of him was released from prison and he told me that my husband was killed under torture. Our situation in his absence became very difficult. We had nothing to eat, so I decided to leave Ghouta with my kids. We spent some time in Adra, but the situation became increasingly difficult; no food, no medication and no bread. We decided to move to Sweida.

We rented a house there and my eldest son started working in a restaurant, but he developed a pain in his back due to the long working hours and carrying heavy objects. In Ramadan, I received some money and borrowed some more and managed to send him to his uncle in Turkey to be treated. My daughter and I started working in sewing and embroidery. My health is very poor but I have to work to pay the rent and feed my children. If they get sick, I cannot even take them to the doctor. This is our situation.

«we wondered if
we would ever return»

I am not sure if I will ever be able forgive. How can I forgive those who killed my husband, starved my children and displaced us? However, people eventually need to understand each other and build this country hand in hand, but this needs so much time.

When we left our house, we wondered if we would ever return. Now, after two and half years of displacement I wonder if we will become like the Palestinians!

The Apricot Trees Were
Blossoming



Um Ruslan
(Al-Qusayr)

We spent our days in constant fear. It was the worst for the children especially when shells fell near our house. Once, while I was preparing food, our neighbors' house was hit. A bunch of women sought refuge in a nearby building and I ran with them with my little son. A missile landed amid our group and I lost sight of my son. After an agonizing while, the dust settled down and we were able to see each other. I heard my neighbor screaming while recovering her son's body. It was extremely sorrowful.

We gathered in a room waiting for someone to take us to a safe place. They took me to my sister's house. An hour later, my nephew came and asked me to change my place due to the bombing. I didn't like it but I yielded. We arrived at a place with so many women crying. I felt heartbroken. I saw four men in front of that house, and one of them screamed when he saw me: "your eldest son has died Um Ruslan". I passed out, and when I regained consciousness, they took me to the room where he was laying wrapped in a white shroud. I only saw his face because they did not allow me to see his body. The men buried him without letting me say goodbye.

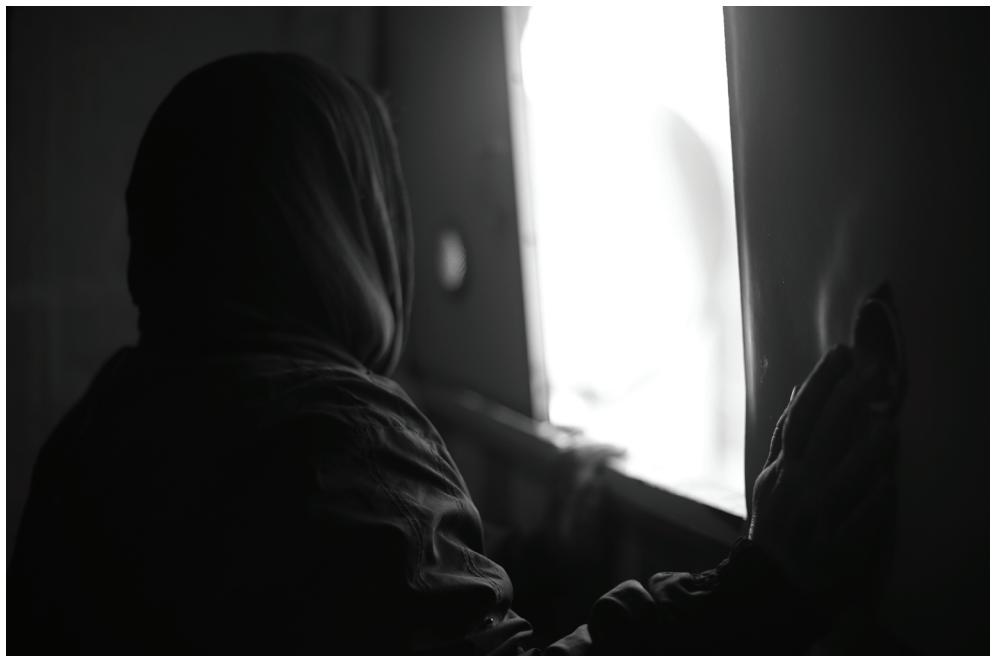
The villagers buried their loved ones in a hurry and we ran away because the bombing increased.

I will never forget that day because the apricot trees were blossoming and I could see white flowers all along the escape road.

I had ten children and my only dream is that the rest of them grow up in their country.

«They buried him without letting me say goodbye»

Mother's Day Gift



Um Saeid
(Al-Qusayr)

My eldest son was buying bread when a shell hit his stomach and severed his arm. The day following his injury, he was still alive waiting for surgery. I prayed a lot for him. I would accept even to feed him and serve him as a child all over again and to suffer much so long as he stays alive. At night, I felt heartbroken and guessed he had passed away. After the morning prayers, they told me he had died. I wandered out screaming in the wild, but they brought me back. They brought my son's coffin for me to say goodbye, and I saw him smiling. I kissed him and said goodbye but I failed to cry. He was my friend, my soulmate and my whole world; yet, I could not cry.

Now I cry every time I see his daughter who was named after me upon his request. She doesn't know him because she was born after his death.

My son was 23 years old and he was successful and diligent in his job. We used to have breakfast and drink Mate everyday together. On Mother's Day, he was the only one to bring me a gift. No one got me anything for mother's day after he passed away. My baby is gone.

Nothing more can happen in Syria, and I really hope that one day we can return. We would meet with our neighbors and friends who lost a son, a friend or a loved one. We will return with this younger generation, and the rest will be taken care of by God.

My son left me a little girl to remember him with, and it's a most invaluable memory in the world, especially when she calls me "mother".

«He left me a little girl to remember him with»

Let Us Live Happily with
the Remaining People



Um Faisal
(Al-Raqqah)

Does it matter who I am or what my name is? I am a mother who lost her son; just like all the bereaved mothers in Syria.

You can call me whatever you like, but I want to tell my story to those willing to listen and can do something to protect the survivors.

I am a mother of three. When my husband died 10 years ago, I had to work to earn a living. I worked as attendant in the secondary school where my boys studied. I was afraid that my oldest son, Faisal would be ashamed of my work, but he surprised me on my first day of work when he threw a small celebration with his friends to welcome me. He loved arts, and despite majoring in civil engineering, he did not give up this passion. When the revolution started, he was in his fourth year of university. He would draw banners that they later used in the protests.

In mid-2013, ISIS began controlling Al-Raqqah and we were scared that we might never be able to escape.

My son secured a truck that took me and the other two kids to a safer place, while Faisal decided to move to Turkey and then to Europe by sea with a group of his friends.

While getting in the truck on the day of departure, Faisal stayed said: "if I drowned in the sea, you would not have to bury me; you will find me in some tuna cans". I felt furious with his joke and started crying.

He stayed several months in Turkey to collect the money the smugglers requested, and one day he called me and said they were leaving and that he would call me when he reached safety.

«Does it matter who I am? I am a mother who lost her son»

I spent days waiting for his call but he never called. Instead, one of his friends told me that the boat drowned and my son did not survive.

I could not believe it; I hoped he was mistaken. Perhaps my son was saved by someone, perhaps he is not able to call me, and perhaps... I was looking for every excuse not to believe that he is gone.

A while ago, my daughter gave birth to a baby girl that filled our life with a new hope.

I want to live in peace in Syria. Those who are gone will never return, but let us be happy with the survivors.

I Will Not Lose Hope



Um Mohammad
(Karm al-Zaytoun)

We used to live in peace in Karm al-Zaytoun, Homs with our neighbors of all sects. However, things got worse with the increase in bombing, so people became wary of each other and they began fleeing the area. At first, we refused to leave, but the raids increased and so did the risk of clashes and we had to leave.

Cars arrived to pick us up and we randomly split into different groups. My 10-year-old son went with one group, my husband with another and I, with the rest of the kids, went with a third group to al-Shababieh area near Baba Amr.

Two days later, the two groups joined us and but my husband and son were not with them. I was so scared and I cried a lot especially after hearing about the Karm al-Zaytoun massacre that took place when we left and claimed the lives of 360 kids.

For three months, I could not stop crying. I kept watching TV desperately checking pictures of the children killed in the massacre, praying that my son was not one of them and asking God to help me know if he's alive or dead. I was living in both hope and despair. I became violent and beat my other children.

I finally found out that my son was with another group that went to Talbiseh, so I went with my relatives to go get him. When I saw him, I was jumping from joy, I was unable to speak and I kept crying and crying.

My happiness was not complete because my husband did not return yet. But after a while, we found out that he was martyred the day we left, and thus we lost our only source of livelihood. I decided

«I was living in both hope and despair»

to leave with my young children to the refugee camps in Lebanon.

Three years have passed since we first arrived to the camp, and we survive on the United Nations aid that is decreasing day by day. My husband's old handicapped mother and his elderly father live with us and they both need someone to take care of them and I'm the only one who can do that. I'm really sad that I was not able to register my kids in schools.

We all hope to return to our homes one day and that Syria would return to normal.

I am optimistic, and I will not lose hope of returning... I will not lose hope.

We went through a lot and there must be an end to what is happening.

**She Will Come Back
Tomorrow**



Sahar Hasan
(Al-Hasakeh)

Our lives in the countryside were safe. Even when the demonstrations spread all over Syria, we only heard about them in the news (kidnapping, killing and detention). On January 25, 2013, disasters reached my house. We were informed that my twin sister Samar had been kidnapped.

Samar travelled to Hasakeh to buy some things and has not returned ever since. We are not wealthy enough to pay a ransom to the kidnappers, and neither my dad nor her husband and mine are government officials. We had so many questions: who kidnapped her? How was she kidnapped? Why? but we did not have answers to them.

My sister has three young girls whom I am now responsible of. Every time they ask me about their mother, I answer: "she will come back tomorrow".

I still have hope that she will return one day, and every time the door bell rings, my heart beats so fast but I always end up getting disappointed. I started having dreams about her that she is a prisoner in tight places like cells or digs, she screams and reaches out for my help and I am unable to extend my arm and help her. I woke up screaming more than once and went out to the streets and called her name because I felt she was so close to me.

Days went by, the situation deteriorated and armed groups appeared with different names. Takfiri extremist groups came in and imposed Hijab on us. They prevented smoking and put restrictions on the people's lives so they started fleeing. However, I could not

«In my dreams, I see her feeding my son»

leave because I had hoped that my sister would return and because of my nieces that I had to take care of. In September, life was no longer possible and elders felt that the town should be evacuated after they assured us that the road is safe.

The moment we stepped out, missiles began falling on us like rain. I fainted and did not wake up until we arrived to a nearby village. There, they informed me that my 4-year-old son had been killed by the bombs and was buried in the village. My little son went without saying goodbye. He became an angel in the hands of my sister Samar.

My sister started reappearing again in my dreams, but now I see her feeding my son, taking care of him and nurturing him. The dreams were my only way of patience and fortitude.

I, as a mother and a Syrian citizen, hope that peace will return to our country.

I hope the blood of our children and our tears will not go in vain.

I pray that God will inspire patience in every mother who lost a child.

He Returned a Martyr
on Tuesday



Aziza Malla
(Al-Hasakeh)

In 2011, we moved from Qamishli to Rmeilan. When the revolution arrived to our province, we supported it. However, things started to become dangerous when takfiri extremist groups entered a village near Rmeilan.

I have seven children all studying at schools and universities. “Zana” was in the ninth grade when he joined the Revolutionary Youth Movement and began his military training. He started going on patrols on the borders between Syria and Iraq. Then, he became involved in the fighting. He’s the youngest and the most spoiled in the family and he wanted to go fighting on the fronts. He was stubborn and exuberant and wanted to be number one in everything. Even in the cemetery, his grave lies in the first row though many had died before him.

«He told me that he would return in three days»

When his best friend “Kadar” was killed, Zana started seeing him in his dreams. I was so scared at this point and I begged him to quit fighting, but he said that staying home would be a betrayal for his best friend and he returned to the fights. During his last break, I begged him to stay, so he told me that he would return in three days. He did not lie, he left on Sunday and returned a martyr on Tuesday.

I cannot believe he’s gone. I can still feel his soul here. I still see him in my dreams and I can still see him between his friends when they return from the front. Zana is not gone; he remains in my memory and in the people’s memories. He remains in all the children who have been named after him.

I Told You Not to Go
That Day



Fatema Ibrahim
(Qamishli)

When Mohammad joined a training camp near Rmeilan to learn fighting arts, he was still under twenty years' old. We all got surprised because he was a spoiled child who liked luxurious life. I had repeatedly begged him to travel but he used to say: "how can I go and leave people here?"

In his absence, I stayed at home fearing he would come and I wouldn't see him. He came in short leaves every month or two. All I wanted to know was how he lived, how he ate and who washes his clothes. He used to take care of his appearance and his clothes, but the war changed him.

Every time he came in a leave, I would try to convince him to stay and not to break my heart, and he would say: "how about the other heartbroken mothers? I fight for all of them, and I cannot sit still while all those mothers are sad".

We were expecting Mohammad on the Eid, but he did not come. The second day, they called his brother Yasser who went out quickly. My husband got scared and told me that our son had gone, but I wouldn't believe it.

The following day, my husband gave me a pill for headache, and when I told him I did not need it, he insisted that I take it. He looked so sad. When I asked him what happened, he started crying. I screamed: "please don't tell me something happened to our son!" and when my husband nodded, I couldn't stop crying and all the neighbors heard me.

Flashbacks of his childhood and youth started appearing in my mind and I wanted to see him. We went to the mosque where his

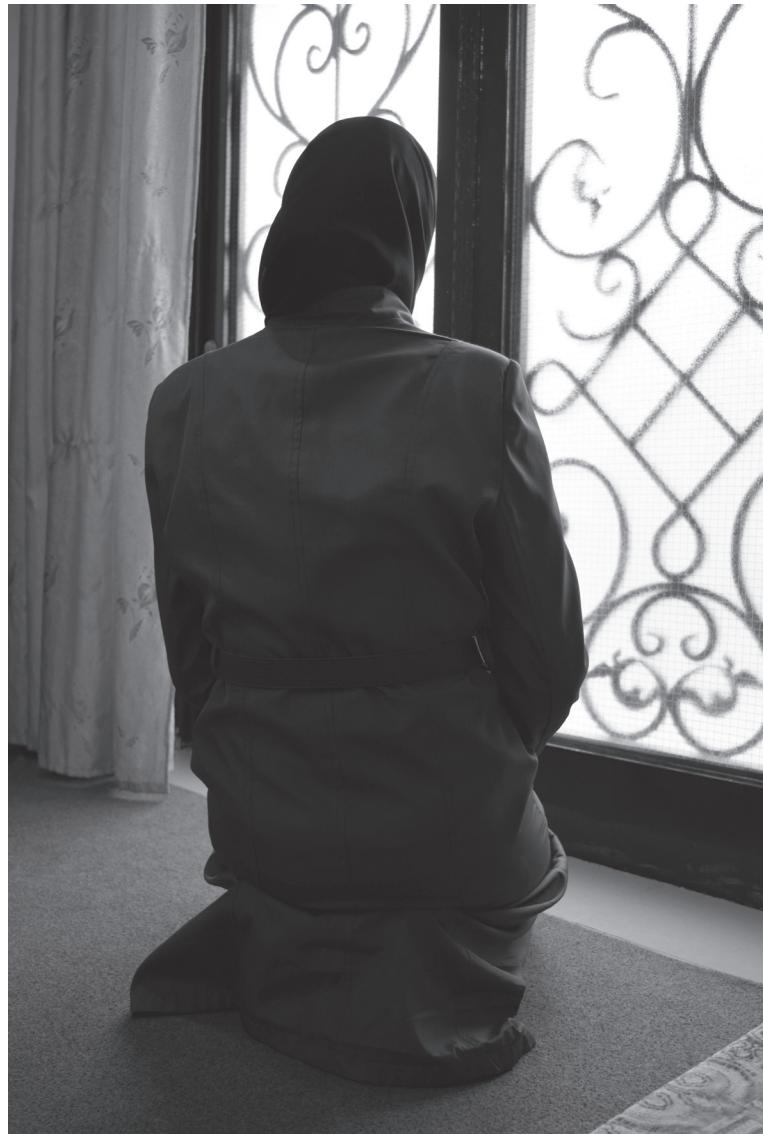
«Were the bullets
painful? Who wiped
your sweat?»

coffin was and suddenly I stopped crying. I was very surprised how I could endure it and not die myself. I begged everyone to get out and approached the coffin. I kissed his face and said: "I told you not to go that day, but you said: 'my friend's mother is crying over him; how can I sit still? I have to go', and you went and you got killed".

"Were the bullets painful? Who wiped your sweat and how did your soul leave your body?" I asked him "your mother was not next to you to take care of you... you broke my heart my baby".

I hope that the war will end and the land remains ours. I would then feel that my son's blood did not go in vain.

That Is Our Destiny



Fatema
(Jobar)

We used to lead a normal life with our husbands and kids. Suddenly, the crisis occurred and we couldn't do anything about it. We were besieged in Ghouta and we couldn't go out. The winter was very harsh and nothing would keep us warm.

We had some flour and I made bread and cookies for the kids. Then, we ran out of everything. When summer arrived, the situation became a bit better and we were able to grow vegetables to feed the kids, but my husband was killed by a shell while on his way back home.

The siege was very harsh, and we lived in fear, hunger and death. The missiles would fall on us from everywhere. We suffered too much. One night, my husband woke up feeling a weird smell in the air. He heard people shouting that they were being hit with chemical bombs and screaming to wake people up. He woke us up and took us to the roof of the building so we can breathe fresh air. That night, more than 2,000 people died while still in bed.

When my husband died, I couldn't stay in Ghouta. My parents paid money to get me and my kids out. We've been staying with my parents in Sweida for a year now. I'm not comfortable or happy, but I can do nothing to change our destiny.

Friends my age are still not married and here I am, a 52-year-old widow with three kids knowing nothing about our future. If I knew who killed my husband I would never forgive them. Perhaps, not knowing is better so that I wouldn't hold grudges on anyone.

Our country has been destroyed to the ground, but we keep praying that everything will be solved and we will be able to go

«I am, a widow with 3 kids knowing nothing about our future»

back and build it. Our country is not sectarian; people loved each other and were able to coexist. This war is a mistake. Some people started demanding freedom and my husband and I had nothing to do with them, but we got hurt like everyone else. I hope nothing had happened and we stayed in peace because there is nothing like our country Syria.

One Centimeter Away



Um Issam
(Al-Hirak)

My son Issam was very spoiled because he was the first grandchild in my husband's family and he was affectionate, lovable and very gentle.

He was not distinct in school but his Arabic teacher expected him to have a bright literary future because Issam used to write beautiful stories with happy endings without knowing that his own story would have a very sad ending.

Before the army entered the village, some families escaped fearing what might happen, but we did not leave because we did not have any another place to go to.

When the army entered, I was at the house with the kids. The sound of bombing was terrifying and my daughter started crying. We decided to go to a shelter but my daughter could not walk so her brother carried her.

The following day, an eerie silence dominated the area. Issam decided to go get some supplies and help out the men. I tried to convince him that he was still young, but he did not listen to me and told me that I could count on him. He said he would write a story about what we were going through and would make me the heroine.

«He said he would write a story and would make me the heroine»

An hour later, some relatives came and asked me if they could bury my husband with the rest of the martyrs. I was stunned... my husband!? I told them they were wrong because my husband was not in the village. I called the family where he worked and they told me that he returned the day before. I now knew he was killed while trying to enter the village.

I asked the men to let me say goodbye to my husband, but to my surprise they firmly refused. I waited for my son Issam to return. The evening came and he had not returned yet. I asked some men about him but they avoided answering me.

It was only the following morning that I knew he had been buried next to his father. I lost my mind, my husband and my son.

They told me Issam was shot in the heart. What murderer is that? Why didn't he miss my son's heart? He could have survived if the bullet was one centimeter away. But the killer did not miss, and my son did not survive.

I sent my daughter with my sister and her husband to Damascus and begged them to take her with them to Jordan. I followed them many weeks later and was forced to stay in the Zaatari refugee camp for months where I saw and heard stories that gave me the chills. The camp was only for humiliation and indignity.

Yes, we lost a lot, but we all hope we could return one day, rebuild our demolished homes and re-grow our burnt land.

I do not carry hatred in my heart, but I would want to see the people who killed our kids being held accountable for their actions and I will not rest if the killers are wandering among us.

We will forgive only after they have been punished.

So I would not Lose
my Son



Kordstan
(Kobani)

I lived a happy life in Kobani with my husband and four children. However, in 2013, we had to leave our city because ISIS took control of the region, and as a woman I had to dress fully in black so that nothing of my body can show. My husband went to Lebanon and did not come with us because he was Kurdish, and according to ISIS, he is a sinner.

My children and I lived a difficult life. Drinking water used to be cut off. I was scared for my oldest daughter because she is young and there is no doubt that ISIS would hurt her. I was also scared for my teenage boy because ISIS might recruit him.

I was once carrying a bucket of water in each hand, revealing my face so I can see my way when an ISIS car pulled over and the men in it yelled at me to cover my face. I told them I would not be able to see, but they said: "do not speak! Your voice is awra [sin] and if we see you here again we will whip you forty times".

My children used to go to school and my daughter once told me that some men came every morning and took my son to be trained on weapons. I asked him about that but he denied. The following morning, I followed him to school and saw that everything his sister said was true. I lost my mind and felt certain that my son was lost especially after he became radical and religious and started attending ISIS meetings and events.

I started thinking about a way to leave the area to save my son. One morning, I took my youngest sick boy with evidence of his illness to meet the ISIS Emir. The guards tried to stop me and threatened to

«I felt certain that my son was lost»

kill me but I insisted. After a long discussion, the Emir allowed me to leave the city. I prepared the necessary documents, packed some clothes and left the city with the kids in a taxi. When we were away, I revealed my plan to the kids, but my son got angry and I knew at that moment that he wanted to join ISIS.

After 17 hours of torment, we arrived to the borders, but that torment was more merciful than the humiliation we received later.

I'm waiting for the day they tell us to return. I swear to God if I return, nothing will make me leave again, even if they give me a ton of gold here. The decision-makers of the international community must feel the Syrians' suffering. Isn't all this suffering enough for them to do something?

Unfortunately, our
Dreams Have Been Stolen



Hiba
(Rif Dimashq)

One day in 2012, I drove my car carrying medical supplies, blood bags, blankets and child medicine towards Douma. I approached the checkpoint without fear because I was from that area and belonged to the “minorities” which means the military would not search my car. When I reached the checkpoint, my car door was opened and strong hands pulled me from my hair. My head was trusted in a black bag and my hands were cuffed. They pushed me into another car. The whole process took less than 90 seconds, during which all the military kept insulting me.

They drove me to a nearby area, took away my things and searched me in an inappropriate manner. I spent two hours, during which they went to my house, stole my things and my computer and threatened my 13-year-old son. Then, they took me to a military detention center and then to another.

The bag on my head was pierced so I started to learn the place. I was in a room with a bed used for torture. I saw my laptop open in front of an investigator; they raided my house. All I thought about at the time was my son. Was he at home? Did they detain him? Did they hurt him? I just wanted to make sure he was safe.

Sometimes, days went by without questioning. They used to call for me and keep me for hours without a word and before returning me to my cell. I stayed 9 months in prison, where I learned how to lie to protect myself and others and how to adapt with hunger, lice and lack of hygiene (once I stayed 40 days without a shower).

After I got out of prison, I knew the informer who reported on me

«Was My son at home?
Did they detain him?»

but I have never thought about revenge. I'm sure that one day he will receive punishment.

I hope to see Syria a state of law and justice, a civil state where we achieve our aspirations. We started with a dream and began a revolution hoping to get what we wanted, but our dreams have stolen.

I hope the bloodshed will stop and that we live and raise our kids properly. If it had been for the Syrian population, we would not have reached this point.

He looked like he
was sleeping



Hiam Ibrahim
(Qamishli)

All mothers here are heart-broken and all have had painful experiences. This pain differs from one mother to another. Some still live on hope; others have lost hope a long time ago.

I have three children and two of them live abroad. Just like any mother on earth, I have always wanted to wed my third son, Kadar, build him a family, see his children and make him happy.

In 2013, Kadar finished ninth grade and joined the YPG (People's Protection Units). At first, he stayed in our village, but later he moved to the front. They took him to the media section because he excelled in technology and computers.

ISIS reached the area and began to take control, so Kadar and his colleagues went to fight them. No one told him to do so; he just went on his own. Shortly after that, he was injured in his leg and was taken to Turkey where he stayed two months for treatment. He returned after one of his friends had been killed. When he returned home on leaves, I would beg him to stay on checkpoints rather than going to the front, but he would say angrily: "if someone once again told me not to go to the battlefronts, I would never return home".

His last leave was supposed to last for seven days but he only stayed for three. We begged him to stay longer but he refused and he died three days later.

He went to the front to film, and on his way back and while entering a village named Palestine, a landmine exploded and killed him and one of his colleagues.

«That night, I felt my body burning»

On the night when Kadar was killed, I could not sleep. I felt my body burning and I kept telling everyone that something must have happened to him. The following day, they brought him from Derek Hospital and dropped him home. I opened the coffin and saw him. He looked like he was sleeping and looked beautiful. I kissed him and hugged him. All our neighbors were here: Kurds, Arabs and Yezidis, and they cried more than I did.

After four years, the Syrian people in general and the Kurdish in particular have suffered immensely. We will never forget our children, but we do not want more mothers to lose theirs.

What Can I Tell You?



Um may
(Aleppo)

What can I tell you? That my daughter was raped before leaving?
They have raped the whole country. We are all raped.

My daughter was not hurt, she is still beautiful, recovering and her spirits are higher than ever. I thank God that her personality is still the same, full of life and hope. Sometimes she cries and says: "I'm not crying for myself because many girls like me have been tortured and assaulted. I'm crying for my country... for the smile that they stole from us, and which I cannot see in your eyes anymore".

We lived in Aleppo and my daughter used to go to Aleppo university. When the demonstrations started, she took part. The security started arresting demonstrators, so my daughter hid for a while at our relatives' house and stopped going to the university. A few days after returning home, a group of half-masked men came and forcefully took her. I called my husband but the worker at his shop told me they had just arrested him. My girl and her father were taken within the same hour.

Six months passed without any news about my daughter. Then one day, a car stopped in front of our building and she walked out of it with a broken leg. She fell on sidewalk and could not reach the front door, so the neighbors rushed to help. We were happy and we cried so much, but she remained silent. For two months, she did not say a word and I missed her voice. She would only talk whispering to the mother of one of her friends who died under torture.

We decided to go to Turkey, but on the departure day, she decided to speak and she said: "mom, I do not want to leave. I am fine, and we still have work to do".

«It was like the first time
she said Mom»

The moment she spoke was like the first time she said Mom when she was a little girl. I temporarily delayed travel, but the situation exacerbated and we had to leave to Turkey.

Now we're safe and my daughter has recovered. She talks and laughs and she awaits the day to return to Syria. She changed her name and now her friends call her "Syria"... Syria, the country that was raped but came back stronger, and hopefully it will be better and more beautiful than before.

I do not carry hatred in my heart; rather, I carry hope. For me, Syria is my whole world.

Two Prayers



Mayada
(Tartus)

I received a lot of messages on my Facebook account from people I know and others don't... people who saw Marah's photo and was astonished by her angelic beauty. Their condolence messages bring back memories and distress. My twenty-year-old Marah was killed by a shell on her way to Damascus. The messages bring back images of her hair strands scattered on the seat, of her warm hands that used to cuddle mine and of her smile that used to fill the house.

I lost her body, but her soul still lives with me. I see her in her sisters and recompose her image. One of her sisters has the same hair, the other talks the same way, and the third has the same laughter.

One of the messages was from Um Malek, a woman from Damascus whose sincere words and deep emotions struck me. She shared a similar tragedy. She also has a daughter named Marah who was hit by a shell in Damascus and became invalid.

Because of Marah the martyr and Marah the living martyr, Um Malek and I became friends. We exchanged phone numbers, and our frequent phone talks were a consolation for both of us. I always ask to speak to her Marah so I can encourage her to withstand her disaster. Days passed by and our friendship got stronger with Marah returning hope for both of us.

One day, I travelled to Damascus and Um Malek kept checking on me along the route, She insisted that I visit her in al-Midan neighborhood. I was hesitant at first, but went in the end. I hugged her Marah, smelt her and kissed her as if she was my Marah. We sat and cried a lot and they insisted that I stay the night.

«Her soul still lives
with me»

The same evening, Um Malek's son calls to tell her that he was about to ride the sea. He asked for her consent and her prayers. She told him that two prayers would be with him along the way. She turned towards me and said: "please join your prayer to mine. You are the mother of a martyr and heaven will respond to your prayers". I prayed that her son reached safety and that he would return soon to his mother, his country and to Marah who is still alive.

On That Day, I Lost...



Um Mohammad
(Qalamoun)

We used to live in Qalamoun. When they told us the army was coming, we were scared of the possibility of clashes so we decided to leave for a while until the situation calmed down. One day, the shells hit the house where I was living with my husband, our kids and my husband's family. I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast while my son was with his father in the courtyard and my daughter was with her aunt next door.

The warplanes were bombing and suddenly a helicopter dropped two explosive barrels. One of them landed in our house and the other in the aunt's house. I lost consciousness and when I woke up, smoke and dust covered the whole place and both houses were completely destroyed. I went out to the courtyard and saw my husband's sisters lying dead on the ground. I could not find my kids. I looked for my husband and found him stuck alive under the rubble. I asked him where our son was but he did not know. He told me not to step on the debris lest my son was there. I started looking for my daughter when my sister-in-law suddenly walked in carrying her body and screaming: "I found your daughter". The little one had died immediately. I went back to my husband and started removing the rubble with my hands and to my horror I found my two-year-old son there dead as well.

On that day, I lost my son and my daughter. My husband was wounded. He lost two sisters and the third had her leg amputated.

I buried my two children next to each other because they were very close to each other. They used to play together and they have departed together.

«I found my son
there dead»

We moved to Lebanon. My husband's treatment lasted two years. I gave birth to a son who is giving me hope. Soon, we will go to Sweden but I do not want to move far away from Syria.

At the beginning, we did not support any parties. However, after I lost my two kids, I changed my attitude but I still believe that God will take revenge for us.

I believe that God will take revenge.

Things may be difficult to return to normal, but we hope to return and to hold accountable all the criminals because we will not be able to rest if our children's killers were walking among us.

In Syria, we are all losers and the bloodshed has to stop.

Where to Start?



Um Nofal
(Rif Hama)

Where should I start? No words can ever describe this tragedy. My sister was killed with all her children except a little boy who is now fighting death and seems likely to join his mother and siblings soon.

He is now one of my children, I love him and take care of him, but I cannot control myself because every time I hug him I cry, and when he cries we all weep for him.

We lived in the village. My house was safe because it is build from concrete and cement, unlike other mud houses in the village. My siblings used to take refuge in my house whenever the village was shelled.

The village people were of different sects but everyone lived in peace. We used to share joys and sorrows and despite all what was said about sectarianism, our intimacy and love had never been hurt.

When clashes increased, I left to Hama with my children since we have a house there. Our neighbors and relatives remained in the village. I gave my sister the key to my house because it is safer than her mud house.

One night, the shelling intensified. A rocket penetrated the bedroom where my sister was hiding with her children. She died immediately with two of her children, and this little one remained a witness to this gruesome massacre.

Next morning, the families buried their martyrs as fast as they could, fearing more shelling. Some mothers were not able to say goodbye to their children or siblings; others died leaving only remains of their bodies. So many people were buried without a ceremony or goodbye.

«How will we return the smile to their faces?»

My nephew's case is hopeless and the doctors did not want to keep him in hospital. My children became very attached to him and they surround him all day. Even my little girl asks me: "can I give him a little bit of my life so that he can survive?" My children ask me how they can help injured children. What am I supposed to tell them? How can we explain the massacres to them? How will we return the smile to their faces?

We are peaceful. Syria's people are all peaceful and good, and what is happening is beyond our endurance.

Blue shoes



Nadia Morad
(Al-Hasakeh)

My son Juan was twelve years' old. He was a good boy, smart in school and he wished to become a teacher. When the shelling intensified, we used to run terrified to the basement and spend the night there. Still, we never wanted to travel, until the year 2015 when the artillery entered our neighborhood and we had to escape to Qamishli.

On the Nowruz day, the celebrations were close to our house so Juan insisted we go and celebrate. We all went together and I stood with his younger sister aside. At sunset, she was sleepy so I took her to the house. Before we reached, a huge explosion lit the sky. I started running and calling the children and my husband ran towards the celebration square too.

I saw a boy sitting cross-legged on the street and yelling: they're all dead... they're all dead. I felt terrified. I ran like a crazy person praying to God that my boy was still alive. I said to myself it would not matter if he was injured so long as he was alive.

He was not in the square, so I went with his father to look for him in hospitals. It was the most painful moments when the doctors were revealing the faces of the deceased children so we can identify our son. Suddenly, a man appeared carrying my son in his arms. I recognized him from his shirt, and his father recognized him from his blue shoes. My husband rushed towards the man inquiring about our son, but the man answered that the boy had passed away and that he was taking him to the morgue.

I did not run towards my son. Instead, I ran the other way and

«I went to the square
and started looking for
his glasses»

cried bitterly. The following day, I went to the square and started looking for his glasses and his hat among the dirt and blood. Some neighbors saw me and took me back home.

Those days were like a festival; people kept moving from one house to another to give condolences. Everybody in the neighborhood lost one child or more; some even lost all their children.

I wish this war would stop. I wish peace could fall upon us and that bombings and massacres would end.

A mother's heart is like no other hearts. Her pain is like no other pain. She suffers the most.

I will never forget Juan. He remains there in my heart, and every morning I wake up to his image.

I Will Tell You Next
Time



Elham
(Al-Hasakeh)

I'm a mother of three young men. Two of whom studied in university, and the third, Marius did not continue his education. Since childhood, he was fond of three things: football, music and fighting. He worked in repairing generators and sometimes in filming videos. He also learned how to play the organ, but in 2013, he left that all behind to join the Military Syriacs Council.

He used to go away for long periods, and when he came back home, we would sit alone and talk. However, every time I asked him what was going on with him, he would say: I will tell you next time. He insisted on his stance, especially after he saw how churches were being destroyed.

On his last visit, he went to the photographer and then he asked me to keep his photograph, saying that I would need it when he got killed, and that this visit would be his last. He asked me to feel proud and not to cry when seeing his photo among the martyrs. Furious with his words, I tried to stop him and I even tempted him to travel, but he was determined.

One evening, his brother read on ISIS website that they had killed him. He did not tell me anything, but my niece woke up at dawn yelling that she saw in her dreams that her father and Marius had died.

The news was confirmed and we knew that ISIS had cornered him and his comrades and killed them. The young men fought till their last breath even though they could have escaped. My life has been very bitter since I lost my son, and I do not think that the fire

«I do not think that the fire in my chest will ever go off»

in my chest will ever go off. What saddens me most is that I was not able to see him and bury him; burying him would have perhaps made feel a little relieved.

I hope that peace falls upon Syria. Before the crisis, I loved to travel and I encouraged my kids to do so. Now, I wish every mother will not send her children abroad. If every mother did so, there would no longer be any one to build and protect the country.

Mom, I Am Hungry



Um Alan
(Qamishli)

My son Alan did not complete his education. He went to Damascus, worked for ten years, and then returned to Hasakeh. He worked here until he finished military service.

When the revolution began, he insisted on joining the battle. He would say with a laugh: if I did not go to fight, who would defend us?

He used to go away frequently and he always told his siblings not to tell me where he was. Once, at the end of Ramadan, they told me that he was in Rmeilan. He called and said he was okay, and promised to visit me during the Eid.

He called me again that evening and I was so surprised. I started crying when he said on the phone: "pray for me mom; we are trapped and it's a very vicious battle".

On that night, I dreamt of him calling my name. I woke up, got out of bed and ran to open the door. My husband was surprised and I told him Alan had been calling me. The same night, Alan fell in the hands of ISIS.

I spent that night crying. On the second day, I dreamt that he came home with his friends and told me: mom I'm hungry. On the third day, I dreamt that he was trapped in a hencoop.

The Eid arrived and passed and Alan did not come home.

His brother started looking for him and found out that Alan had fallen with some of his friends been captured by ISIS.

Alan stayed alive for forty days, and then we received the news of his death.

«I dreamt that he came home and told me: mom I'm hungry»

One day, a large convoy of cars arrived with lots of Kurdish and Arab friends and I knew that they had brought Alan's body.

On that day, I told the media that my son fought for all the Arabs and Kurds not only fight his family. He fought for the freedom and dignity of all people. Alan is a gift to this country.

Today, I'm the mother of a martyr. I sit with bereaved women like me and talk about our pain. They are of different nationalities and sects and their children were killed on different fronts; each of them fighting for their cause and convictions.

We hope that this fire goes off and we pray to God to protect our boys and girls.

The Holiday's Dress



Kawthar Hasan
(Al-Hasakeh)

At the beginning of the revolution, we lived in Hasakeh, but we escaped to a village forty kilometers away to protect our children from death. We did so for our safety reasons but also because of the frequent water and electricity outages.

I had two daughters and a son. My oldest daughter was 6.5 years' old. She was very polite and very sensitive. We were very attached to her because she was a beautiful intelligent girl, but it seems God had created her for Him and not for us.

On the Nowruz day, my parents came to visit us in the village. I decided to go with my father to visit Hasakeh, especially that my daughter wants a dress for the holiday.

We arrived to my parents' house and had lunch. My sister took the kids to the square near the house and I stayed with my mom and dad. When my sister returned, it was getting cold, so I turned the heater for the children and sat them down in front of the television.

I went to the kitchen to prepare some tea wondering why I was feeling very sad. Suddenly, I heard the sounds of two explosions. Children started crying and I ran towards their room to tell them to hide in the corridor, but only then, I realized that my daughter was not there. I called her but she was not in the house.

Everyone went out to look for her and I stayed with the children. Then I heard them saying her name (Nirveen) and my uncle walked in carrying her while she was covered in blood.

We immediately took her to the hospital but her head injury was so severe that she did not make it.

«It seems God had
created her for Him and
not for us»

When I meet other mothers, our conversation winds up talking about our departed children and we say that it is destiny just to comfort each other. We pray that this tragedy ends for the sake of the remaining ones.

After my daughter died, I learned that I was pregnant. I want expected that my newborn daughter that has her sister's name will comfort me and make me forget my tragedies, but until now, I'm still not able to say her name.

I am against the revolution because in a revolution, young people cannot get crushed, humiliated and insulted? It was better if everything stayed the way it had been and nothing had happened.

Enough bloodshed... enough!

A Small Hole



Antoinette Baromi
(Al-Hasakeh)

My son is married with two daughters. He used to work as a carpenter with his father and play in the scout youth team. He was friendly and highly supportive and never refused any request for help.

He did not celebrate the New Year's Eve with us because he was responsible for the neighborhood generator. He feared power outages might damage the generator while the people celebrated.

One day, a neighbor asked him to turn the generator on, but the owner refused. My son did not care about the owner because people needed electricity, and on his way to turn it on, a sniper bullet went through his forehead to settle in his brain. His friends tried to rescue him but they couldn't because of the intense shooting.

Our neighbor did not tell me that the truth; he said that he was injured. I started running down the streets and into hospitals screaming: please just tell me where my son is. When I was told he was in the church, I went and saw him laying down, covered in blood with his green eyes still open. I put my hand on his head. There was nothing but a small hole; that was the end of my son.

For a whole year, his blood remained on the ground and did not dry. Every time it rained, the blood would show, and when the rain stopped, the blood would disappear. My son died a martyr, a water martyr. God appreciates my son's martyrdom more than the rest because he wanted to quench the thirsty.

«My son died a water martyr. he wanted to quench the thirsty»

All I wish is that the situation subsides.

If all mothers in Syria had raised their children in a proper way,

things wouldn't have gone this far. What happened in our country has pushed us back to the ages of Cain and Abel when brothers would kill each other.

When I see my friends crying in longing for their children who are abroad, I tell them that they sent them abroad willingly. I lost my son because of God's will. They can call their children and hear their voices, but I cannot.

I always dream that I'm opening the door to greet him, but he never shows up.

What a Horrible Loss



Lina Ramadan
(Ras Al-Ain)

Our suffering started in 2013 when we had to leave our homes in Ras Al-Ain. Our whole family left with my husband's sisters and my parents. It was one of the hardest moments. We were scared for our children's lives and our first goal was to escape the shooting. We hoped to go back home and the children go back to school.

For a while, we heard about the events in other Syrian cities from the news and we saw mothers crying for martyr children. Then, the Free Syrian came and we felt the pain of Syrian mothers around the world.

We escaped leaving the men behind to defend our homes. I wished I could defend my home but I was not courageous enough. After our departure, I heard that some young women and mothers did take up arms.

Four months later, we went back to Ras Al-Ain, and were shocked to see that our houses had been stolen and destroyed. They did not just steal, they shattered our history and our past. They destroyed everything and messed up the smallest details. What saddened me the most was that they had messed up the photographs and books: our memory.

I feared they might enter Ras Al-Ain starting with the surrounding villages, where we were. People started talking about ISIS atrocities and I began having nightmares in which I would see them coming to cut my children's heads and I would wake up crying.

After the city had been liberated, we returned. Despite the destruction and ruins, it was one of the happiest moments in my life

«They had messed up
the photos and books:
our memory»

when I entered with my family. Now, when I sit with other mothers, we talk about the missing ones and cry. We wish this war would end, because mothers have all the same suffering.

Our children's future was everything we cared about. When we left, our children became without schools. We have not lost them but I feel as if I'm losing them bit by bit.

**But Women Are Not
Weak**



Noura
(Al-Hasakeh)

We used to hear stories about massacres against Armenians, Chaldeans and Syriacs from our fathers and grandfathers. Now, we are all living in similar situations, not just the Armenians and Syriacs.

My children were not able to complete their university education; my parents travelled and I can only see them from time to time.

We lack electricity, water and money, and food and medicine are not available. This has caused us to be depressed. Fear is always a companion to our gatherings and outings, and fear and anxiety caused by the crisis even follow us to bed. Before I sleep, I often wonder if I will be alive tomorrow. In the morning, I ask myself: if I went to work, would I be able to go back home?

We have no desire to do anything, and if a new project ever came to mind, we would immediately dismiss it because we might not be here tomorrow; then, why to change the current situation?

We always have to resist, feed the hope for peace and stability and overcome the anxiety and fear that destroy our dreams and livelihood.

The last scenario in my mind is immigration. We have lived here, worked hard in this house, and educated our children; how can we become refugees? This is our land, our homes and our lives.

Women are always the worst victims in war. But women are not weak; they have all the patience, strength, endurance, peace and love in the world.

We want peace and coexistence among all. I wish that all countries

«This is our land, our homes and our lives»

contribute to this. Many countries are feeding off this crisis to protect their interests. I hope my words will reach all the people. I want everyone to fight for their land because they can only find peace and safety in their country; among their families, relatives and friends.

An Open Door



Jourie
(Tartus)

Fifty-seven days after joining the military services, Yusuf returned home on his first leave. His thirty-first birthday had already passed, but he loves to celebrate, so we gathered with his siblings and his fiancée to blow his birthday candles.

Our friends and neighbors came as well because Yusuf was loved by everyone. He hugged me, kissed my hands, smelled my scent and said: oh mom, you smell so good! His house was ready and his fiancée had tidied it. His garden was filled with roses which I used to water. His leave was short and I did not see him as much as I liked to. On the day of his travel, I woke up to find him sleeping next to me; he had not done that since he was little. When he left, I remained waving to his car until it disappeared behind the eucalyptus trees.

The following day, I called him to say that I gave condolences to the mother of his friend, who had been killed, just like he told before his departure. He answered in a discontinuous voice: I cannot hear you clearly mother... I will call you later. I did not know that I was going to be the bereaved mother and the one who needs consolation. At 7 in the morning, I received a call that Yusuf had been killed.

Now, I sit in front of his room with a view of my old memories. I hold on to those memories and hope they will take me back to the 28 years I spent in Rukn Al-Din in Damascus with neighbors and friends from all around Syria. We were one family. We used to go shopping together and drink tea at night. I cried a lot when we decided to go back to the village after my husband retired. Here, I stand in front of Yusuf's bedroom looking

«He hugged me and
said: oh mom, you smell
so good!»

at the phonebook that still has my friend's numbers, remembering the past and wishing it will become my present so our hearts can be filled with love again.

We Share Our Hearts



Fidaa Mirza
(Al-Hasakeh)

My son Louay studied until middle school and then joined the Syriac Military Council to fight for his village, beliefs and country. He was concerned about the Christian villages and he used to guard the churches especially during the holidays. He loved his country and used to say: we need to look after each other and after our Syria; no one should travel. If everybody left, who would remain in Syria?

All his friends travelled and he stayed alone here.

During one of his patrols, he received a shrapnel in his foot, but that did not stop him from going to work. He used to come for quick visits, and he was very happy and hopeful that they would defeat ISIS.

Three days before his death, he was visiting us. He suddenly walked into the house and he looked busy. He took his weapon and quiver and left immediately to Qamishli with his father. A large group of ISIS surrounded them there, but they fought until their last bullet, and he died there.

I still cannot believe that my son is dead. I sometime think he is going to knock on the door. I feel he is still alive.

The hardest thing is that I did not see his body. I was informed of his death and they sent me a photo of him. Can you imagine the situation where you cannot say goodbye to your son, the martyr? However, I organized a funeral just as if he were here.

When I meet other mothers with martyred sons, we share our hearts. They give me a piece of their hearts and I give them a piece of mine. We are all proud of our sons because they loved their country and their people, and they died fighting for their beliefs.

«When I meet other mothers we share our hearts»

I am proud of my son and will talk about him everywhere I go. He did not run away from facing our enemies. He fought them until his last breath even though he could have escaped. We are all destined to die, but being a martyr is the most honorable way of death.

I tried the taste of martyrdom, and despite my sadness, I wish that every mother would be proud if her son was a martyr. If we did not offer our children, who will fight for our county? Martyrdom is pride for every mother.

Louay's memory will remain in our hearts, and he will remain alive among us.

I Just Want You Alive



Sultana Ahmad
(Qamishli)

I have eight children: four boys and four girls. They are my whole life. Their father died when they were young and no one helped me raise them.

Ibrahim was very shy, but smart. He got married years ago and has two daughters. He bought a piece of land and started building a house. We have not paid the price of the land yet and the children's room is still without doors.

When the protests began, he joined the National Defense and worked at one of their checkpoints. His wife remained with me. Forty days later, he came home, took her to her parent's house in Ras Al-Ain and came back home again.

He used to ask me if I needed anything, and I always said: I just want you alive.

One day, he went with his friend to join the checkpoint. They took a military path near the village school. On the way, they encountered some young men from the village, and they were not suspicious. However, when they approached, those men shot my son.

That night, I stayed up late outside the house. I was comforted that he was close to me near the school. When I heard the shooting, I felt the bullets passing over my head, so I entered the house mortified.

The following morning after I did some shopping, a man came to the house and said he wanted to talk about my son. I felt worried because I thought that Ibrahim had hurt or attempted to kill someone. Halas, it was the opposite. The man had come to tell me that my son had been killed.

«I felt the bullets passing over my head»

I am proud of him because he never hurt anyone and no one ever complained about him. The whole village stood beside me because they liked my son since he had good manners. Everyone in Tel Tamer attended his funeral.

I comfort myself with his children because I am raising them.

Perpetrators Must Be Held Accountable



Mariam Hallaq
(Rif Dimashq)

I used to live with my happy family in Harasta. I was an activist in the Baath party and for 25 years, I was the principle of three different schools.

I had two boys, but 13 years later, our parents insisted on having a granddaughter. I got pregnant and gave birth to my son Ayham; the biggest tragedy in my life.

Ayham was a great kid and a great young man. He studied dentistry and was preparing for his master's degree. He was very peaceful, and did not even work in relief. He was more interested in transitional justice.

The first time, they arrested him for three months. He moved from one branch to another until he ended up in Adra prison. When he was released, he went back to university and finished his master's thesis. The invitations for discussing his thesis were ready.

Six months later, he was arrested again from the university. We tried to find out his whereabouts, but in vain. After exactly six days, I entered his room and suddenly imagined that the door was opened and a group of men entered and threw his body on the floor. I knew that something dangerous had happened.

We searched all security branches and three months later, we were informed that our son had died four days after detention.

His friends said that a student, who I will never forget the name, arrested him and beat him with a stick on his head and left him bleeding. In the office of the National Union of Syrian Students, they had arrested several students including Ayham. They hit them, pulled

«The jailer said: let us know only when he dies»

out their fingernails with pliers, pierced their ears with needles and poured boiling water on them until a car arrived and took him with some of his friends. The beating did not stop the whole way and we found out that Ayham lost consciousness. A doctor among the detainees tried to ask for medical assistance because Ayham started to get blue, but the jailer said: let us know only when he dies.

He remained like that for a few days. Once, a young man sitting beside Ayham felt that his body was cold. He told the jailers and when they entered the cell, Ayham had been dead for half an hour. They wrapped him in a blanket, put a number on him and took him away.

After the huge load of tragedies that I witnessed while looking for my son's body in different places where they kept dead bodies, and after hearing similar stories from other mothers, I had a desire of revenge, even by my own hand.

I know who killed my son. He was not killed by a sniper or an explosion. He was beaten to death in the university campus. One of the killers might be the son of a friend of mine or simply one of my former students. How did the monster inside them wake up? I do not know. I forgive the parents because some mothers are like me and have nothing to do with anything. We will return and sit as mothers together, but the perpetrators must be held accountable together with the heads of security branches.

The hope of building a democratic, secular Syria remains in our hearts. We hope that citizens recover their rights and that forgiveness prevails among us.

