

Syria

A War on Childhood



July 2012

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1 FOREWORD

“The conflict in Syria is distinct in the degree to which legal instruments, and the international community who signed up to them, have proved completely unable to furnish any measure of security for children.”

By the time we see the end of the conflict in Syria it will be clear that children have paid a heavy price for the right to live in peace, go to school, and feel safe in their homes and communities. Children have not been spared and it is particularly alarming the extent to which children have been directly targeted. War Child has a long history of finding ways to help children who have been caught up in the crossfire of wars waged by adults. In Syria, we have been outraged by the violence directly aimed at children and young people, and have responded by setting up a programme with our implementing partner, War Child Holland in Lebanon, to provide emergency assistance to children fleeing the violence.

Neither side in this conflict has distinguished itself by protecting children in the areas they control. The Assad regime and the militias it sponsors have shot, detained, tortured and sexually abused children throughout the 16 months since the uprising began. But opposition forces also stand charged with including children in their ranks, and failing to properly protect children when engaging in hostilities in civilian areas.

Children in conflict countries should be able to rely on adults, both inside and outside of the country, to take decisive steps to ensure their safety. This protection is their entitlement under humanitarian and human rights law, including the Geneva Conventions, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The conflict in Syria is distinct in the degree to which these legal instruments, and the international community who signed up to them, have proved completely unable to furnish any measure of security for children. We have a right to ask questions about this failure, and to demand more from our leaders than the current diplomatic stalemate and humanitarian disaster.

This report illustrates how the growing civil war in Syria ranks as one of the worst for the depth and scale of abuses perpetrated against children, with little response from the International Community.

The situation in Syria is, however, a moving target; so the report does not attempt to be conclusive but to draw existing strands of evidence together¹ in order to explicitly demonstrate the severity of the impact the Syrian conflict is having on children and young people (based also on War Child’s extensive experience of operating in contexts of conflict and insecurity) and to encourage practicable action towards its eventual peaceful resolution.

We are failing Syria’s children.
We must not continue to fail them in the future.

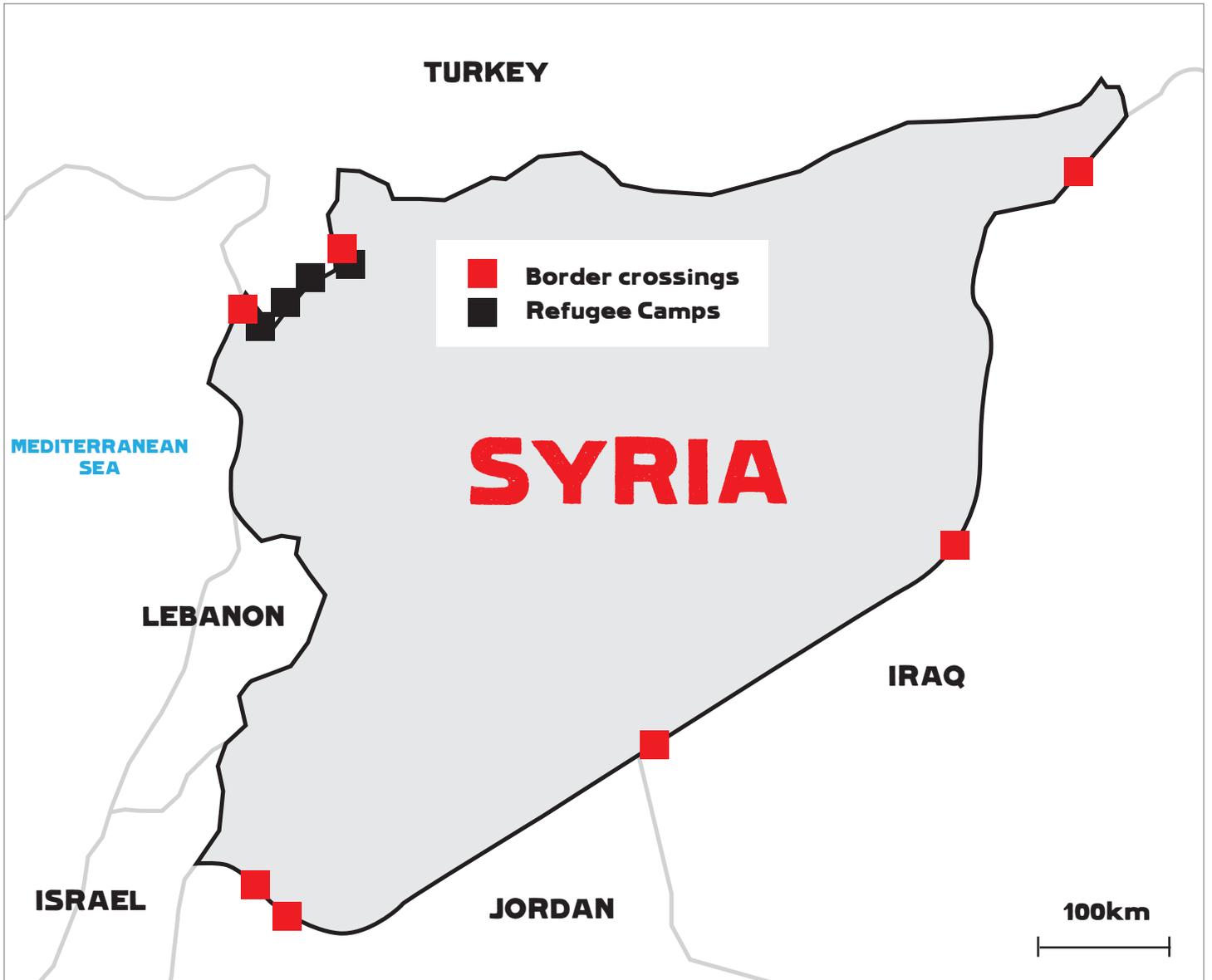
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Williams".

Rob Williams
Chief Executive, War Child UK

NOTES

1. War Child cannot individually verify evidence and accounts from within Syria; accept those taken directly by War Child staff in Lebanon. Sources used in this report attempt to give a balanced view of atrocities committed against children, but we are bound by the lack of evidence resulting from the restrictions on foreign media and NGO’s entering the country.

2 SYRIA ON THE MAP



3 KEY POINTS

The situation faced by children in Syria **is shockingly grave**

The treatment of children has been undeniably callous. Children and young people have been summarily massacred; illegally detained; sexually abused; used in combat; abducted and tortured, denied schooling and access to humanitarian aid; and deliberately targeted in violent attacks.

Syrian parties to conflict are guilty of war crimes

Every single grave violation of children in conflict, as defined by the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism,² has been committed by one side or the other to this conflict. Failure to hold the perpetrators to account undermines the international legal system designed to protect children in conflict.

If Kofi Annan's UN Peace Plan was an attempt to save lives, it has failed

The deaths of children and civilians have increased significantly since the plan was approved.

The lack of unity at the International level has cost thousands of lives on the ground

Russia and China may blame each other for the lack of effective action at the Security Council but the bottom line is that this represents a collective failure of international leadership. Inaction and indecision on the part of the International Community is not justifiable.

This is a failure of British Diplomacy

Despite the UK government's ambitions for Britain's role in bringing peace and stability to conflict affected areas, the Syrian conflict highlights the weaknesses in our approach and the particular difficulties which Britain faces in brokering agreement between the nations who might be able to directly affect the situation on the ground in Syria.

The donor community has been backwards in coming forwards

The UN request for resources to respond to humanitarian need is less than half funded and humanitarian needs have grown from 1 million to 1.5 million in the space of two months.³ There are an average 500 refugees per day crossing over Syria's borders to seek refuge from the violence and who are in need of immediate assistance.

Donors need to think now about the long term

Peace is not built by addressing only the explicit impacts of war. Humanitarian aid cannot address root causes and this generation of Syrian children need access to quality services, such as education, and to support structures that can aid their recovery and reintegration in the long-term. .

Notes

2. The gravity of the situation is also reflected in the fact that the UN Secretary General's Annual Report added Syria to the list of countries of concern. See http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf, p.1.

3. See <http://www.wfp.org/content/15-million-syrians-need-humanitarian-help-un> for UN statement quoted by the World Food Programme and Alert Net (22/6/12) for revised estimates from April 2012. <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/crisis-centre/crisis/syria-unrest/>.

4 A CHILDREN'S CRISIS

" We are really quite shocked. Killing and maiming of children in cross-fire is something we come across in many conflicts but this torture of children in detention, children as young as 10, is something quite extraordinary, which we don't really see in other places."⁴

UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

The Syrian crisis has distinguished itself from recent clashes in the Middle East for all the wrong reasons. Children and young people are always disproportionately affected by the direct and indirect impacts of violent conflict, but injury and death tend to be as a consequence of children being used in direct hostilities as combatants, or incidental victims caught up in crossfire. Syria is no exception on these counts, but reports document additional human rights abuses that are surprisingly grave. Let alone not being protected from the violence, children's lives are deliberately being targeted. In this sense, the case of Syria is disturbingly unique. Evidence on the ground shows that children have been treated with zero tolerance: a detained thirteen year old recalls his torturers words - "they said, 'remember this saying, always keep it in mind: we take both kids and adults, and we kill them both'".⁵

- **Between 500⁶ and over a 1300 children have already been killed.⁷**
- **49 children were massacred in one incident alone.⁸**
- **635 children put into detention centres,⁹ where torture has been repeatedly testified**
- **Children, girls and boys, as young as 8 have been forcefully involved in hostilities.¹⁰**
- **There are an estimated 470,000 children and young people affected by the crisis.¹¹**
- **It is estimated that around 50% of all displaced Syrians are children and young people.¹²**
- **Girls and boys as young as 12 have been sexually abused.¹³**

Children and young people have an inherent resilience, but the trauma of the atrocities experienced in this conflict are likely to have an intergenerational impact that un-born Syrians will inherit. June and July have been the bloodiest months yet; with the Syrian Human Rights Group counting the June death toll of children at 203,¹⁴ and July seeing the largest single massacre so far, with activists estimating that 200 people were killed in Hama.¹⁵

" they said, 'remember this saying, always keep it in mind: we take both kids and adults, and we kill them both'"

Until December 2011, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had been providing estimates of the death toll, but ceased to do so as numbers were so difficult to verify.¹⁶ However, at the time of writing, there is general consensus that over 10,000¹⁷ civilians and combatants have been killed so far with some estimates reaching 16,000.¹⁸ Over 1.5 million people have also been affected by the crisis, around half of which will be children and adolescents.¹⁹ This kind and level of damage to children has triggered concerted international action in the past but has failed to do so in the Syrian conflict. Any viable solution must be based on peaceful negotiation, but what is the scale of atrocity necessary to stimulate international action; and why has this not taken place?

CONTEXTUALISING CRISIS:

Since gaining independence from France in 1946, Syria's political history has been characterised by an authoritarian military-dominated rule and an enduring 'State of Emergency' which was first declared in 1963 and only lifted in April 2011 as the wave of the Arab Spring reached Syria, inspiring protests and calls for democratic rights and political reforms.

The peaceful protests that the world first saw in Dar'a in February 2011 were met with a brutal response from the Syrian government security forces, igniting further protests and retaliation in other cities across the country. Since then, the areas of anti-government protest have effectively been under-siege - continually bombarded and attacked by Syrian security forces and pro-government militia (known as shabiha). The UN peace plan for Syria, demanding a cessation of violence, has not been observed by either side of the conflict – denying prospects of children gaining access to any humanitarian relief.

The situation on the ground is critical: violence has created a dire humanitarian crisis and the socio-economic impact of the conflict on Syria's population continues to worsen. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated the high levels of poverty and unemployment which existed in Syria before March 2011 and evidence shows that worse is still to come. Countries afflicted with war take an average of 20 years to reach their peace-time trade levels and 14 years to recover their trajectory of economic growth.²⁰ The long term damage of the Syrian conflict will therefore continue to impact young job-seekers and the children of unemployed families.

THE LAW OF WAR:

The legal definition of 'war' is important as it triggers the response of international systems in place to protect against violations that fall within this remit.

Syria ratified the Geneva Conventions on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), without reservation, almost 6 decades ago in 1953. IHL is known as 'the law of war' and distinguishes between international and non-international armed conflict - it is only applicable when the state of violence goes beyond what is judged to be 'internal tensions or disturbances'.²¹ For armed violence to be classed as 'internal armed conflict' there are three considerations relating to the intensity of conflict (being beyond isolated incidents of violence), its duration and the level of organisation (e.g. parties to conflict are engaging in premeditated attacks).

The nature of the conflict in certain parts of Syria have certainly met the 'intensity' and 'organisation' test.²² back in early May, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Jakob Kellenberger, declared that the violence in Homs and Idlib had reached the level of an armed conflict of a non-international character, to be governed by the laws of war – a qualification that could imply future prosecutions for war crimes.²³

"It is now clear that certain acts committed by either side in those places can qualify as war crimes ... It also means that the parties will be violating international humanitarian law if they attack civilians or civilian objects."

As the UN Human Rights Council reported back in November 2011 in their independent inquiry on Syria, the Syrian government have a duty of care towards its people:

"Governments have an obligation to maintain public order. They bear the ultimate responsibility for protecting individuals under their jurisdiction, including those participating in public assemblies and exercising their right to freedom of expression... In the Syrian Arab Republic, the high toll of dead and injured is the result of the excessive use of force by State forces in many regions. Isolated instances of violence on the part of demonstrators do not affect their right to protection as enshrined in international human rights law."

POLITICISATION AND POTENTIAL THREATS:

Syria is a major influence in the Middle East. Any destabilisation there could cause knock-on effects in countries such as Lebanon and Israel, where factions inside Syria can mobilise powerful proxy groups, including Hezbollah and Hamas. Lebanon, for instance, is largely split between groups that support the Al-Assad regime; and reports such as of the stop and search of refugees entering Lebanon through the Beka'a valley (an area that is predominantly Shia and under Hezbollah control) only creates additional tension since the refugees are predominately Sunni²⁴. The recent outbreaks of violence in northern Lebanon have already sparked fears that the unrest in Syria has the potential to incite sectarian war in the region and mirror the violent tensions of its neighbour.²⁵ Syria also has close ties with Iran – a rival of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia – which could potentially draw these powers into a full scale Middle Eastern conflict, if not carefully negotiated.²⁶



A woman and her son shelled, Homs

The potential of the Syrian conflict to trigger instability in the Middle East makes the role of the International Community, in coordinating an effective response, as delicate and challenging as it is pivotal. The lack of decisive action in relation to Syria is in stark contrast to the reaction of the International Community in response to Libya in 2011.

Notes

4. Radhika Coomaraswamy quoted on BBC world news: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18405800> - accessed 21/6/12.
5. Human Rights Watch (3/7/12): 'Torture Archipelago: Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011', p. 37.
6. UNICEF estimate: <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Media-centre/Press-releases/UNICEF-steps-up-response-to-children-affected-by-the-crisis-in-Syria/> - accessed 12/7/2012.
7. See: <http://www.vdc-sy.org/> - accessed 24/5/2012.
8. See for example: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/29/us-syria-un-idUSBRE84S10020120529> - accessed 29/5/2012.
9. Human Rights Watch (3/7/12): 'Torture Archipelago: Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011', p. 36.
10. See: UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 23. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf.
11. UNICEF (21/5/2012): 'Syria Crisis Sub-Regional Situation Report', p.1.
12. Ibid, page 2.
13. Human Rights Watch (15/6/12), 'Syria: Sexual Assault in detention': <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/15/syria-sexual-assault-detention>
14. See: <http://www.syrianhr.org/Attach/June.pdf> - accessed 3/7/2012.
15. Accounts are so far unconfirmed by the UN but both sides have acknowledged the scale of deaths: see <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18825473> - accessed 12/7/12.
16. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18093967> - accessed 10/6/2012.
17. See for example: <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html>
18. See: ACaps (21/6/2012): 'Disaster Needs Analysis: Update Syria Crisis', p. 1.
19. UNICEF SOWC (2011): 46% of the Syrian population are under 18.
20. See: DFID, MOD, FCO (2011), 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy', p. 7: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf>.
21. For more information, see: ICRC (2004), 'What is International Humanitarian Law'.
22. See: <http://www.hrw.org/node/106869/section/09> - accessed 22/5/2012.23. See: <http://www.vdc-sy.org/> - accessed 24/5/2012.
23. See: <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/05/08/syria-redcross-idINDEE8470AF20120508> - accessed 23/5/2012
24. See: www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/07/syria-refugees-tensions-lebanon - accessed 22/5/2012.
25. In recent months, War Child Holland staff who are on the ground in Lebanon have witnessed an escalation of violent attacks and there is a growing sense of tension and fears within the country that are mirroring the kind of escalation to conflict within Syria itself. See for example: www.naharnet.com/stories/en/46073-syria-targets-wadi-khaled-with-shelling-again - accessed 10/7/2012.
26. See for example: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13855203 - accessed 22/5/2012.

5 WAR CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

“ Children have not been spared the horror of Syria’s crackdown. Syrian security forces have killed, arrested, and tortured children in their homes, their schools, or on the streets. In many cases, security forces have targeted children just as they have targeted adults.”²⁷

Children’s Rights Director, Human Rights Watch

In 2005, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1612,²⁸ seen as groundbreaking for tackling issues on children and armed conflict. As a result of this resolution, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) was established to track incidents of grave violations against children in a hope to increase awareness, gain an idea of the scope and scale of the problems and, critically, create a process to lead to accountability for the perpetrators of these acts. Once triggered, the MRM monitors and reports, through country task forces, on six grave violations: the killing and maiming of children; the recruitment or use of child soldiers; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other grave sexual violence against children; the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access to children. These do not represent the sum of human rights abuses against children; still, each and every one of these violations has been breached in the Syrian conflict. The UN Human Rights Council recently stated that “children have suffered serious violations and that State forces have shown little or no recognition of the rights of children in the actions taken to quell dissent.”²⁹

STANDARDS OF CONDEMNATION:

1. The killing or maiming of children

- By April 2012, it was clear that children as young as 9 had been directly targeted in violent confrontations.³⁰ The Violations Documenting Centre (VDC) – an organisation linked to local coordination committees within Syria³¹ – estimates that over 1300 children have been killed so far.³²
- Snipers and other State forces have killed or wounded children aged 10 years and younger.³³
- In the recent Houla massacre in May 2012, 49 children were brutally killed (there were 108 murdered altogether). An activist group even claimed that some of the children killed had their hands bound with blue ties used as a substitute for handcuffs, showing how premeditated these killings were.³⁴

On 28th May 2012, The Guardian newspaper reported the chilling story of an 11-year old boy whose 5 family members were killed during the massacre in Houla³⁵. The boy described how he smeared himself in the blood of his dead brother and played dead as gunmen loyal to the Syrian regime burst into his family home:

“ My mum yelled at them. She asked: 'What do you want from my husband and son?' A bald man with a beard shot her with a machine gun from the neck down. Then they killed my sister, Rasha, with the same gun. She was five years old. Then they shot my brother Nader in the head and in the back. I saw his soul leave his body in front of me... They shot at me, but the bullet passed me and I wasn't hit. I was shaking so much I thought they would notice me. I put blood on my face to make them think I'm dead.”

Human Rights Watch also spoke to survivors of the massacre in Houla.³⁶ A 10-year-old boy told them that he saw men wearing military clothes shoot his 13-year-old friend:

“ I was at home with my mother, my cousins, and my aunt. Suddenly I heard gunshots. It was the first time I heard so many gunshots. My mother grabbed me and took me to a barn to hide. I heard men screaming and shouting. I heard people crying especially women. I looked outside the window. I was peeking sometimes but I was afraid they would see me. Men wearing [uniforms] like army soldiers, green with other colours [camouflage] and white shoes, entered our house. They went outside after a couple of minutes. Then across the street I saw my friend Shafiq, 13 years old, outside standing alone. An armed man in military uniform grabbed him and put him at the corner of a house. He took his own weapon and shot him in the head. His mother and big sister – I think she was 14 years old – went outside and started shouting and crying. The same man shot at both of them more than once. Then the armed men left and the FSA [Free Syrian Army] soldiers came.”

2. The recruitment or use of child soldiers

Although most human rights violations seen during the conflict so far can be attributed to Assad's regime, both sides of the conflict continue to commit gross abuses against Syrian children: the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict received reports that the opposition Free Syrian Army have now also used children as fighters.³⁷ Government forces have enlisted children as young as 8.³⁸

“...a witness stated that several dozen children, boys and girls ranging between the ages of 8 and 13 years, were forcibly taken from their homes. These children were subsequently reportedly used by soldiers and militia members as human shields, placing them in front of the windows of buses carrying military personnel into the raid on the village. “

3. Attacks on schools or hospitals

Schools: Children in Syria have been systematically denied access to education by frequent raids on schools³⁹ and by the use of their schools as military detention facilities or as vantage points by snipers indiscriminately targeting civilians and rebels.⁴⁰

- **First-hand accounts reveal that attacks on schools have been used by the Syrian Armed Forces as vengeance for student protests and that children have been killed in school grounds being used for military purposes.**⁴¹
- **During protests armed forces were told to “shoot without distinction” resulting in the deaths of three young girls and on another occasion, five children were killed in a secondary school during demonstrations witnessed by a former member of the Syrian security forces.**⁴²

War Child has taken direct eye-witness accounts of schools being used as military bases:

WAR CHILD: CASE IN POINT - SYRIAN MOTHER IN LEBANON

“I came to Lebanon from Nizariya yesterday. Our house is close to the school where the military has been based since they took it over months ago. The troops stay in the school, while the tanks sit outside in the schoolyard. The tanks have been there since the beginning of the revolution, but the militarization really picked up a few days ago.

A week ago, a tank broke the schoolyard fence and parked inside. A full battalion came to the school, hundreds of men. Three days ago, one soldier from inside quietly told me to leave the village, warning me that they were receiving orders to prepare to flatten the entire village. There had long been random bombing here and there, but he said these new orders were to eliminate everything in sight. We gathered our things and walked the 2 km to the border. The army was firing on people coming over on smuggling routes, but fortunately, my friend's husband works as a guard at the border, so we were able to come over legally. We were the only ones allowed to pass.”⁴³

Similar barriers to education are also faced by refugees of the conflict - as War Child's Emergency Project Coordinator states; “Syrian children are facing many challenges to access education while in displacement...But the most important barriers preventing children from continuing their education are fear and uncertainty. They are afraid of being targeted if registered in school.”⁴⁴

Hospitals: ongoing fighting has devastated health systems, as hospitals have been shelled and also starved of their supply chain. Children and civilians die from the lack of basic medical equipment and supplies; doctors express frustration at their helplessness to deal with and treat the horrific injuries they see on a daily basis.

- **Hospitals have been directly attacked by artillery fire from Government forces.**⁴⁵
- **Therefore, not only have hospitals become inaccessible, insecure and unsafe environments for patients, those seeking medical refuge have themselves been targeted due to injuries they carry that are seen to implicate them in the protests. The president of NGO 'Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) voiced additional concerns that, "Medicine is being used as a weapon of persecution" itself.**⁴⁶
- **Barriers to receiving healthcare have been extreme to the extent that even the medical workers themselves have been tracked down and subject to threats for providing 'assistance' to those associated with opposition groups.**⁴⁷
- **These combined factors have caused desperation, fear of formal treatment and countless unnecessary deaths. Footage and information from 'citizen journalists'⁴⁸ tell stories of people being treated in makeshift field clinics, of mutilated bodies of men, women and children lying on bloodstained floors.**⁴⁹

"I watched a little baby die today – absolutely horrific, I just saw a two-year old been hit, they stripped it and found the shrapnel had gone into the left chest 'The doctor just said "I can't do anything". His little tummy just kept heaving until he died. That is happening over and over and over."

The late Marie Colvin, killed by shelling in Homs - speaking to the BBC, Baba Amr, February 2012

4. Rape or other grave sexual violence against children

Accounting for scales of sexual violence, particularly against children, is always a significant challenge due to the nature of such attacks and the fear and trauma associated with it. This makes it difficult to come forward with reports and for external actors to interview children and require them to recount such horrors. In the case of Syria, this is even more pertinent as Syrians themselves fear for their lives and external actors are unable to gain any full access to victims. Case studies are therefore just an indication of what is likely to be revealed as wide-spread violations of this kind, adding to growing accounts that claim rape is being used systematically as a specific tactic to incite fear among the Syrian population.⁵⁰

- **Boys and girls, as young as 12, have been sexually abused.**⁵¹
- **The Chairman of the Arab Institute for Clinical Excellence in Syria reported two girls, aged 10 and 14 that were pregnant as a result of rape.**⁵²
- **First-hand accounts indicate that children are present in detention centres in locations throughout the country and are being subjected to ill-treatment and torture – including sexual abuse.**⁵³
- **Reports document rebel fighters being forced to watch their daughters being raped repeatedly.**⁵⁴

"**Syrian security forces have used sexual violence to humiliate and degrade detainees with complete impunity. The assaults are not limited to detention facilities – government forces and pro-government shabiha militia members have also sexually assaulted women and girls during home raids and residential sweeps.**"

Human Rights Watch, Middle East director

5. The abduction of children

There are likely to be un-documented accounts of abductions related to killings and use in military hostilities – but the case of Babr Amr presents proof of how and why children are being targeted in this way:

On the 12th April, around 20 children ranging from 8-13 were reportedly abducted from the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs by government security forces and pro-government groups.⁵⁵ The children were then used as decoys or 'human shields' as government troops raided villages. Children were placed at the front of the military bus in order to prevent attacks on them by anti-government militia.⁵⁶

6. The denial of humanitarian access to children

Humanitarian access has been denied by the Syrian government and Syrian activists have also failed to abide by the peace plan put in place to save lives. Children are suffering inordinately as a result. Conditions resulting in lack of access have been imposed on humanitarian aid agencies: for example, in Baba Amr, local security forces claim that bombs and landmines left behind by the opposition has made it unsafe for the International Committee of the Red Cross to enter.

In cities where wide-scale military operations have been conducted, the rights to food and water have been violated by military and security forces blocking residents' access to obtain food and other basic necessities; residential water tanks and water pipes have been deliberately damaged⁵⁷. In Homs for instance, many districts are without electricity; food, water and medicine is in short supply; those who remain have been forced to shelter in their homes for fear that they will be targeted by snipers, or become victims of artillery fire.

War Child: Case in Point:

Two mothers and their twelve children from who escaped illegally to Lebanon described the harsh conditions they faced.

One mother said:

“Every day, there is death. It's been more than a year like this. There is no heating fuel, no water, no gas.”⁵⁸

Exemplified by the above examples, in all six categories of grave violation of children in conflict, Syria provides a long list of documented abuse. First-hand accounts also indicate that children have been forced into detention centres in locations throughout the country and are being subjected to ill-treatment and torture:

“ Most child victims of torture described being beaten, blindfolded, subjected to stress positions, whipped with heavy electrical cables, scarred by cigarette burns and, in one recorded case, subjected to electrical shock to the genitals.”⁵⁹

In March 2012 the UN Human Rights Chief, Navi Pillay, also gave her own astonished summary of abuses perpetrated against children:

“ They've gone for the children – for whatever purposes – in large numbers. Hundreds detained and tortured... it's just horrendous ... Children shot in the knees, held together with adults in really inhumane conditions, denied medical treatment for their injuries, either held as hostages or as sources of information.”

Covered by International Humanitarian Law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the conflict in Syria violates every international law and principle on basic Human Rights.

Notes

27. Human Rights Watch (3/2/2012): 'Syria, Stop Torture of Children,' Human Rights Watch news release, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/03/syria-stop-torture-children..>
28. See: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sc8458.doc.htm>.
29. Human Rights Council Seventeenth special session (23/11/11): 'Report of the independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', p. 14.
30. See: UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 22. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf.
31. VDC'S information is based on medical records, direct contact with victims' families and information from the Imam of the mosques where burials are performed.
32. See: <http://www.vdc-sy.org/> - accessed 6/7/12.
33. OHCHR (February 2012): 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', p.15.
34. See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9295268/Massacred-Syrian-children-were-bound-before-being-shot.html#> - accessed 8/6/2012.
35. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/28/houla-massacre-survivor-boy-syria> - accessed 10/6/2012.
36. www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/27/syria-un-inquiry-should-investigate-houla-killings - accessed 07.06.12
37. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17532966> - accessed 22/05/2012
38. See UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 23. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf
39. Ibid. Page 22.
40. OHCHR (February 2012): 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', p.15.
41. See UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 24. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf
42. Ibid, page 22.
43. War Child Holland project testimonial.
44. Quote from War Child Holland staff member - 16/7/12.
45. See: UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 24. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf.
46. See: MSF website: http://www.msf.org.uk/Syria_repression_20120208.news - accessed 6/7/12.
47. See: UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 24. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf.
48. While accounts from sources such as these cannot be independently verified, there have been a number of cases where the UN observers on the ground have corroborated the claims made by such groups and individuals.
49. See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9295268/Massacred-Syrian-children-were-bound-before-being-shot.html#> - accessed 08/06/2012.
50. See for example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9296135/Syria-using-rape-as-weapon-against-opposition-women-and-men.html> - accessed 29/5/2012; and <http://world.time.com/2012/07/12/is-the-syrian-regime-using-rape-as-a-tactic-of-war/> - accessed 12/7/2012.
51. Human Rights Watch (15/6/12): 'Syria: sexual assault in detention'. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/15/syria-sexual-assault-detention>.
52. See reports from 'Women Under Siege': <https://womenundersiegesyria.crowdmap.com/reports/view/30> - accessed 16/7/12.
53. OHCHR (February 2012): 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', p.15.
54. See: TIME article in response to the Women Under Siege Initiative here: <http://world.time.com/2012/07/12/is-the-syrian-regime-using-rape-as-a-tactic-of-war/?xid=gonewsedit> - accessed 16/7/12.
55. See: CNN report: http://articles.cnn.com/2012-06-15/middleeast/world_meast_syria-human-shields_1_human-shields-anti-government-activists-pro-government?_s=PM:MIDDLEEAST - accessed 15/6/2012.
56. See also: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/06/12/220099.html>, accessed 6/7/12
57. OHCHR (February 2012): 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', p.16.
58. War Child Holland project testimonial.
59. See: UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict (26/4/2012), p. 23. http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/A66782.pdf.

6 CHILDREN IN FLIGHT

“ Violence in Syria has proved so severe that its impacts fall far beyond its immediate territory”

War is disruptive to every aspect of children’s lives – their homes being uprooted, their families being killed, their schools becoming too insecure to attend.

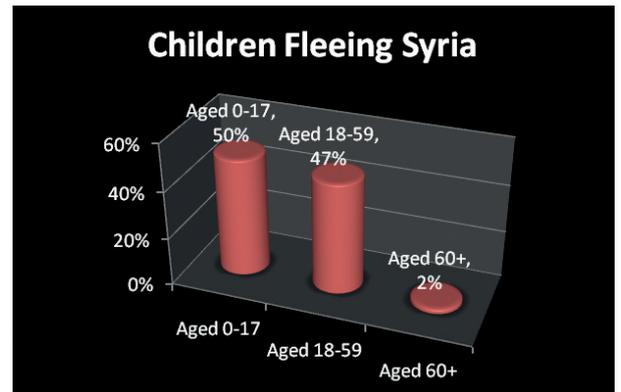
The violence in Syria has proved so severe that its impacts and implications fall far beyond the ‘pockets of violence’ that originally existed and well beyond Syria’s immediate territory. Hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee their homes creating large-scale displacement both internally and externally – undermining the familiar social protection structures available to children through their families, communities and schools.

The majority of families are sheltering from the violence inside Syria itself, with an estimated 300,000 internally displaced.⁶⁰ One of the men interviewed in the War Child project in Lebanon said;

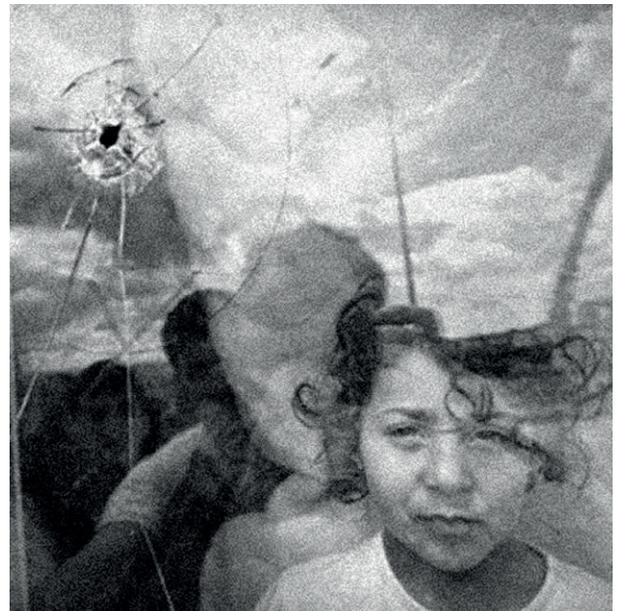
“All the other families remaining in town would leave in an instant if they thought they had anywhere else to go.”

Those that do try to escape face grave danger: Syrian security forces have fired upon and killed civilians trying to flee the violence. Human Rights Watch details Syrian forces having laid landmines near the borders of Lebanon and Turkey to endanger and discourage those fleeing.⁶¹ War Child’s own testimonies also verify the dangers faced and traumas experienced in attempting to flee the onslaughts of violence inside Syria. Ten year old Dima told us her story:

Dima's name and photograph have been altered to protect her identity



Based on UNHCR Data - Syrian Regional Refugees



War Child testimonial: case in point

10 year old Dima and her family were in a queue of cars waiting to legally cross the border into Lebanon to escape the violence in Syria.

A month earlier their home had been destroyed by a rocket.

Her Dad had got out to see what the hold up in the convoy was. Minutes later, Dima's father was dead:

"We were inside the car waiting for my Dad when the rocket fell. I went out with my mother to look for him. There was a lot of dust, I couldn't breathe. My Mum was screaming... people were crying and there was lots of blood."

Dima's mother and her five children were terrified and feared further attacks. They were forced to leave his dead body by the roadside. "I couldn't even bury my husband... I will never forgive myself." her mother said, through tears.

"I recognised him from his boots. His face was covered in blood. My Mum was shaking him. I didn't know what to do, I only felt my heart was beating faster than ever."

They arrived in Lebanon with only the clothes on their backs, and the family are desperately trying to hold it together. Because they have no money, Dima has to look after her siblings whilst her mum works and earn a living for the family. Dima told us:

Despite the risks associated with fleeing the country, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are over 91,000 refugees currently registered in Syria's neighbouring countries⁶² (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq) - half of which are under 18 years old.⁶³

"I wish I never saw my dad's body. I am trying to forget but I cannot. I see his face every night...I cry but I don't let my mum see me."

A Syrian mother at the Lebanon/Syria border told us,

"One group came by yesterday to hand out blankets, but that is it. Other than that, we are on our own here. In the beginning there were a few hundred refugees, but now there are thousands. We're staying in homes, but those homes are now running short of heating fuel. Even as refugees, we have to pay rent."⁶⁸

Based on UNHCR Data - Syrian Regional Refugees

This number is rising steadily with an average of 500 refugees crossing the border every day.⁶⁴ The revised Syria Regional Response Plan from UNHCR therefore estimates that there will be 185,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2012.⁶⁵

The stark humanitarian situation faced by those within Syria itself is reflected in the lives of those forced to flee the country, facing poor living conditions, uncertain food supplies and a sense of imminent danger and insecurity. With families under physical and emotional strain and sometimes absent altogether, refugee children are acutely vulnerable and at risk.

The response to the influx of displaced civilians seeking asylum has varied from country to country:

In Jordan and Lebanon, the majority of Syrians live in urban areas, either with host families, in rented accommodation or collective shelters. Many refugees have arrived with limited means to cover basic needs, and rely on the generosity of their hosts. The Lebanese government are not recognising the displaced as refugees, and instead calling them 'those fleeing the unrest'⁶⁶, thus avoiding certain obligations to provide support to the displaced.

In Turkey, the government has taken responsibility for assisting, sheltering and protecting refugees in tented camps and a container city; Iraq is seen as a 'country of asylum of last resort' and at the time of writing, there were 5,400 individuals registered with UNHCR in Iraq – a sharp contrast to the 30,000 in Turkey.⁶⁷

It is assumed by many that the majority of those displaced from Syria will remain in their host countries until the security situation stabilises. In Lebanon, many Syrian families are currently residing with local host families, living on what their hosts can provide. Those not living with host families live in collective shelters (such as school buildings and mosques). What resources and life savings families brought with them are slowly being depleted as the unrest continues; and the generosity of the host communities is not limitless. The areas in which the displaced are settling are poor areas to begin with, and the growing influx of people has only added strain on already scarce resources.

Notes

60. www.humanrights.gov/wp-content/themes/hr6/images/Syria_displacementRefugees_2012Apr25_U575.pdf - accessed 10/06/2012
61. www.trust.org/alertnet/crisis-centre/crisis/syria-unrest - accessed 22/05/2012
62. NHCR (June 2012), 'Revised Syria Regional Response Plan, p. 4. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fec681e9.html> - accessed 1/07/12.
63. UNICEF (2/7/12): 'Syria Crisis Sub-regional Situation Report Jordan/Lebanon/Turkey/Iraq', p. 1.
64. UNHCR (June 2012), 'Revised Syria Regional Response Plan, p. 4. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fec681e9.html> - accessed 1/07/12.
65. Ibid, page 4.
66. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/07/syria-refugees-tensions-lebanon> - accessed 22/5/2012.
67. UNHCR (June 2012), 'Revised Syria Regional Response Plan, p. 4. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fec681e9.html> - accessed 1/07/12.
68. War Child Holland project testimonial.

7 ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS?

If Annan's Peace Plan was about saving lives, it has been a comprehensive failure.

Annan's six-point peace plan

As of 16th March 2012

1. Syrian-led political process to address the aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people
2. UN-supervised cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians
3. All parties to ensure provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, and implement a daily two-hour humanitarian pause
4. Authorities to intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons
5. Authorities to ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists
6. Authorities to respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully

War Child testimonial: case in point

Syrian mother in War Child's emergency child protection project

"We left a month ago, after a tank shell hit our home. The security forces were bombing the whole city. Our home was in the western district, next to the city hall and the national hospital. There were snipers everywhere. Then tanks started moving in from each of the checkpoints, firing randomly, even though there was no battle going on at the time.

I gathered up my children and hid in the bathroom, on the side of the house away from the checkpoint. The firing lasted from morning until night. We stayed huddled in the bathroom the entire time, more than 24 hours, all seven members of the family. We fled the next night, even though the bombing was still ongoing. Our neighbours had been killed, so we knew we had to leave no matter what. A sniper shot at us from the city hall building, but thank God, no one was hit.

As soon as you open the door of your home, they fire at you."

With public opinion clearly demanding action, the international community face two key challenges in response to the current situation in Syria: bringing about an end to the violence, and bringing help to its victims. The response to the political challenge of reducing the violence has been fractured, discordant and so far unsuccessful.

Steps have been taken to progress prospects for peace, but the political complexity has overshadowed these efforts and, with traditional tensions between intervention and non-intervention prevailing between the UN Security Council's major powers,⁶⁹ meaningful developments in international action remain largely nominal. Efforts to meet the humanitarian challenge have also been patchy, with a poor response so far to requests for assistance from United Nations agencies and international charities whose interventions are severely hampered by lack of committed and dispersed funds.

THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE

“ By contrast [to Libya], the situation in Syria represents a colossal failure by the Security Council to protect civilians. For over a year, this Council has not been willing to protect the Syrian people from the brutal actions of their government...The regime’s relentless campaign of violence against its own people has grown ever more reprehensible and ever more dangerous to international peace and security...It is a shame that this Council continues to stand by rather than to stand up.”⁷⁰

Ambassador Susan E. Rice, June 2012

Relative to Tunisia, Egypt and even Libya – where the fighting to remove Colonel Gaddafi from power lasted for eight months – the conflict in Syria has been protracted, with high levels of casualties that continue to rise daily.

Syrian opposition groups – including the Syrian National Council, the National Coordination Council and the Free Syria Army – remain fractious and deeply divided over how to achieve regime change.

The picture is similar within the International Community, with a lack of decisive action resulting from conflicting opinions. The Arab League⁷¹ initially remained silent and reticent to act; Russia and China have vetoed two UN Security Council resolutions that were critical of the Syrian government on the grounds that they would legitimise foreign military intervention. The only unified Security Council action came in the form of the UN peace plan, but this has failed to have any impact on dampening the conflict.

A major failing of the peace plan has been that it did not impose any deadlines and yet the peace plan itself was set to expire on the 20th July.⁷² The situation has deteriorated significantly on the ground since the peace plan was proposed: in the first month alone of the Annan plan coming into effect, 34 children were killed.⁷³ The lack of concerted and unified Security Council action following the breakdown of the peace plan undermines the value of the proposal and fuels a sense of impunity on both sides of the conflict.

THE HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGE

Large scale violence and displacement causes disruption to all basic services and access to the basic daily means of survival such as food and water. As a result of what has reached the scale of Civil War in Syria⁷⁴, needs on the ground have reached critical levels that require immediate funding as well as forward planning for the months ahead.

In March 2012, the UNHCR released the Syria Regional Response Plan (SRRP), a document outlining the humanitarian response required to address the needs for protection and assistance of refugees fleeing from Syria into Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The international and national agencies involved in the refugee response originally estimated that \$84 million will be needed for the 6 months from March 2012. By mid-April 2012, out of the possible 34 agencies included in the SRRP, only 8 had received funding and less than 20% of the requested funds had been raised.⁷⁵ Only a couple of months later and the revised SRSP demonstrates the increasing gravity of the situation as UNHCR’s funding proposal for the crisis has more than doubled to over 193 million dollars; under half of which is currently funded by donors.⁷⁶

THE LONGER TERM CHALLENGE

The future welfare of Syria's people depends to a great extent on their ability to repair their shattered economy and welfare systems; but, equally, for the root causes of internal tensions to be addressed. Physical reconstruction is only one aspect of rebuilding a community and country in which there are underlying drivers to conflict.

The international aid system has a patchy record of staying the course once the immediate humanitarian phase has passed; as television cameras, and therefore the world's attention, quickly shift to the next crisis, vulnerable populations are left at risk of being left without the means to recover.

“The international community is quick to respond to emergency funding requests, but the reintegration of children falls into the fault between emergency assistance and development assistance”⁷⁷

Reintegration⁷⁸ and rehabilitation programming can act as the first step towards visions for long-term peace and prosperity. If such programmes are under-resourced, rushed or absent altogether, then the risk of repeated cycles of violence is significantly increased. The situation in Syria has fractured communities; this has the potential to spark future confrontations among different ethnic and religious groups even once hostilities have died down. The involvement of children and young people in the risks of such violence can be diminished at an early stage. For instance, for every additional year of formal education a male receives, the likelihood of him becoming involved in conflict is estimated to be reduced by 20%.⁷⁹

In sum, if children and youth are failed in terms of the quality of care and services provided to them in times of trauma, unrest and uncertainty, this is likely to have recurring intergenerational implications. The potential for cyclical violence emphasises the huge importance of dealing with the psychological impacts of war and conflict as a preventative, early-intervention measure to positively affecting future generations.⁸⁰

Notes

68. War Child Holland project testimonial.
69. The position of Russia and the US are diametrically opposed: Russia believes that there should be no external interference in Syria and can fall back on the UN mandate that exists to protect people in cases of an international threat to peace and security (in which Syria would be classed as an internal conflict). The US on the other hand, believes that the Al-Assad regime should be removed altogether, leaving little room for compromised action.
70. US Mission to the United Nations (25/6/12): Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians, New York.
71. The Arab League was established in 1945 and has 22 members: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
72. See: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.8075185/k.6B06/May_2012brUNSMIS_Syria.htm, accessed 13/7/12.
73. See: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41892&Cr=syria&Cr1=-> - accessed on 3/5/2012.
74. See for example: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18849362> - accessed 17/7/12.
75. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4f91659a6.html> - accessed 3/5/2012.
76. UNHCR (June 2012): 'Revised Syria Regional Response Plan', p. 4. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fec681e9.html> - accessed 1/07/12.
77. See: <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/ddrforchildren.html>.
78. (Re)integration can be defined as a process of transitional change to improve a child's protection and potential through economic and social inclusion following any form of violence, abuse and neglect.
79. See, [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Attacks_on_schools_brief_final_\(2\).pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Attacks_on_schools_brief_final_(2).pdf)
80. See: War Child (March 2012), 'From Neglect to Protect: bottlenecks to inclusion and (re)integration for the most marginalised children in conflict'.

8 BRITAIN'S LITMUS TEST

BEST LAID PLANS...

“Success will be most likely when we contribute to a coherent international effort. We will play to the UK's comparative advantages of speed, flexibility, a willingness to adapt, and our ability to take a whole of government approach while helping to shape the international response.”⁸¹

The UK government has recently resolved to play a leading role in conflict reduction. This aspiration to global peace making was most comprehensively laid out in the welcome cross-departmental government strategy named the 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS)'. Published in 2011, its aims were to increase the effectiveness of the UK government's response to violent crises and to identify patterns where violence is at risk of escalating into conflict.⁸² Syria has represented the first real test of whether this aspiration could be translated into reality. After 15 months of ever escalating conflict in Syria, the results are unedifying. In fact, it is hard to identify any particular impact of the BSOS strategy in the Syrian crisis.

Syria exposes an international system that is not readily equipped to respond to complex political emergencies. There has been a sense of floundering and reticence that has cost thousands more lives. It must be acknowledged openly that the UK government is a small part of any progress towards resolution – this is not about diplomatic power play, it is about the generations of Syrians that are being failed by euphemisms and empty declarations.

Recent positive steps, such as doubling the UK's humanitarian aid,⁸³ have been taken by the government; but long-term strategic planning is needed to make efforts meaningful for those suffering on the ground.

DYING AS WE FAIL

It is early days for this strategy, but there is far too much at stake to publicly fail. Can the UK be as good as its word?

1. Stepping Up to the Plate

BSOS Position: “Working In Partnership with Others”

“We will use Britain's weight and influence in institutions including the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the International Financial Institutions.”⁸⁴

Syria's Reality: Alone to Survive

The BSOS strategy assumes that the Foreign Office is uniquely adept at pulling diplomatic rabbits out of hats. However, Britain's diplomatic efforts have failed to negotiate a robust Security Council response which could be agreed by both Russia and the US. Rather than search for common ground, the UK has often appeared as an echo chamber for the US position. It is not easy to identify what the UK has contributed to the process beyond condemnation of the violence on the ground and complaints about the Russian viewpoint. As 'shuttle diplomacy' continues to be inflexible and not owned by Syrians, the survival of children and young people is at threat.

The UK should use its 'influence and weight' in the Security Council to effectively broker the dichotomous positions between the US and Russia.

UK negotiations should include an emphasis on the need to prioritise the protection and safeguarding of the lives of children and young people. As such, the UK Mission to the UN (UKMIS) should work with the UN to ensure that staff of the supervisory mission to Syria (UNSMIS), are trained in Child Protection and include an expert equipped to deal with cases involving children appropriately.

The UK government should call upon the United Nations to bring Syrian war crimes to the ICC and in turn provide predictable funding to the reparations mechanism for their redress.

A joined up government approach should include increased DFID planning for and consultation with civil society actors on future engagements within Syria and in its bordering countries.

The UK should work closely with and seek the advice of the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict in order to respond appropriately to the gross violations of children and use the MRM triggers to support our position with the Syrian parties to conflict.

2. Rights as Well as Need

BSOS Position: Humanitarian Action”

“ The UK will ensure that its humanitarian aid is delivered on the basis of need alone and on the basis of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in accordance with its key international commitments.”⁸⁵

Syria’s Reality: Absence and Inaction

Humanitarian access to Syria has been effectively blocked leaving international actors, including the UK, unable to address the plight of civilians inside Syria. However, there are hundreds of thousands who need urgent assistance in neighbouring countries after their escape, around half of them children and young people (many of whom may have been orphaned or had parents killed in the violence). The UK government has responded well to the needs of the refugee population, doubling its aid to just over £18 million in July 2012.

But the needs of refugee children go well beyond the basic humanitarian menu of food, water and shelter. The rights of children and young people are being continually violated; the UK response should take into account the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and develop appropriate measures to address rights violations within its response.

- Even whilst access inside Syria is effectively prohibited, there are enormous needs amongst the new refugee population beyond its borders. Having set an example as a proactive aid agency, the UK government should now utilise its influence to lobby other key donors and actors to fully fund the UNHCR Revised Country Response Plan and ensure that any further calls for funds from OCHA are met with positive and rapid reaction.
- The UK should work to ensure that education should be a priority area within this response. The impact of armed conflict on education has been widely neglected, and a failure to prioritise education can reinforce poverty, undermine economic growth and hold back a country’s physical reconstruction as well as socio-political progress.
- Child Protection should be integrated into DFID funding plans and programme designs for Syria and in neighbouring countries.

3. In it for the Long-Term

BSOS Position: “Investing in Upstream Prevention”

“ ... changes take time and will require sustained engagement.”⁸⁶

“ It is far more cost-effective to invest in conflict prevention and de-escalation than to pay the costs of responding to violent conflict”⁸⁷

Syria’s Reality: Short-Term Thinking”

Sufficient strategic planning needs to be put in place now to ensure that donor countries are adequately prepared to assist those both inside and outside of Syria affected by the conflict through to recovery. In the past, post-conflict countries have been consistently failed by poor donor planning and a lack of consistent effort or predictable funding streams. Long-term and reliable engagement is a sound investment to help prevent a potential relapse into instability.

- The UK should fund not just the immediate and humanitarian needs of those both inside and outside of Syria, but also prepare for longer term recovery of the Syrian people by working with OCHA and agreeing to a longer term funding plan with donors and partners. Plans should ensure adequate funding for the return of displaced populations and the rehabilitation of health, education and other vital services – working towards an integral national child protection system.
- The UK should lead the International Community to ensure that reintegration programmes are seen as a core component of post-conflict efforts.

4. 'Peace is not Just the Absence of War'

BSOS Position: "Laying the Foundations for Peace"

"Protecting civilians is at the core of the UK's policies to prevent, manage and resolve conflict".⁸⁸

"Peace agreements are only the start."⁸⁹

Syria's Reality: Protracted Conflict

DFID should, with immediate effect, enhance its abilities to respond to the best interests of civilians by adopting a Child Protection Policy, in consultation with expert actors.

As with Libya, when such action becomes possible, the UK should send a Stabilisation Response Team (SRT) to support the UN's post-conflict planning and ensure the safety and security of children and young people is prioritised. Staff sent out to Syria should be fully trained in Child Protection.

The UK should work with as many members of the International Community as possible, not just its 'traditional allies', to work towards a broadly-based, meaningful peace settlement.

Notes

81. Ibid, page 22.

82. The strategy brings together the Department for International Development (DFID), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to prevent and respond to external threats that may in turn pose risks to our national interests. See: DFID, MOD, FCO (2011), 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy': <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf>.

83. See DFID article here: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/Latest-news/2012/Syria-Britain-to-double-humanitarian-aid/> - accessed 13/7/12.

84. Ibid, page 2.

85. Ibid, page 23.

86. Ibid, page 24.

87. Ibid, page 4.

88. Ibid, page 23.

89. Ibid, page 15.

9 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

- The situation in Syria has disproportionately affected children and young people inside and outside the country. Immediate and long-term support must be provided.
- **Children and young people have experienced varying forms of all six grave violations, as well as other human rights abuses: any international attempts at redress should involve Child Protection and child-psychologist experts within their missions.**
- The Annan Plan has failed to protect and save the lives of children. Refreshed assessments must be made that reflect the current situation on the ground and prepare for an inclusive, Syrian-owned peace that safeguards the future generations of Syrian children and young people.
- **The UK government has a strong record on conflict but a weak record on prioritising the specific protection needs of children. The FCO, DFID and MoD should work more holistically to address gaps in the BSOS strategy and ensure future programming efforts are child-sensitive.**
- The situation in Syria has demonstrated that the international systems currently in place fail to effectively protect children, if at all. An honest and profound review of international protection systems should be demanded by the relevant states and international institutions. The UK government should use their upcoming G8 presidency to show leadership on this issue.

10 ANNEX

WHAT WAR CHILD IS DOING

War Child is supporting displaced Syrian children and young people residing in northern Lebanon. Our role is impartial and aims to provide support to Syrians and their caregivers and hosts communities alike. We do this by providing Child Friendly Spaces, psychosocial support programmes and other related recreational and cultural activities. Lebanese children (enrolled in the schools where these activities take place) will benefit indirectly from this intervention and the children and young people from Syria and Lebanon are integrated to a greater degree by taking part in this project. This helps build prospects for peaceful relations in the future between the two communities.

The project will be achieved through the following:

1) Child Friendly Spaces.

The project will activate Child Friendly Spaces (CFS's) accessible to Syrians and Lebanese children and their caregivers and the organisation of a programme of activities. The CFS's will be activated in identified local schools selected according to the following criteria: a) priority given to Governmental schools needs; b) concentration, accessibility and vulnerability of displaced and local communities.

An educational supervisor will oversee the CFS operations and the people working in it, including animators and community volunteers. Also some activity specialists will conduct a specific activity in occasion of the special events (one of the foreseen activities will be the creation of animation short films).

The activities programme will encourage also the participation of youth and adults in order to make the CFS's centres of community mobilisation, gathering places and also focal points. Accessibility to the CFS's will be guaranteed also to children located in remote areas through the organization of a transportation services contracted with local companies.

2) Psychosocial support (PSS).

The children will benefit from a structured programme of PSS. This is a 3-4 month course focused on strengthening the healthy development of children and young people living in areas affected by conflict. The intervention is made up of 6 themes addressed with the help of a facilitator, with groups of 15-20 children, and the topics covered will be: a) Identity and Self Assessment; b) Dealing with Emotions; c) Peer relations; d) Relations with adults; e) Conflict and Peace; f) The Future.

Specialised staff will be carrying out a continuous assessment of the children's psychosocial situation. If some cases cannot be treated in the framework of the project they will be assisted to contact other specialist organisations through the establishment of a referral system.

3) Supportive Education component.

In order to restore an education environment for children out of school and to support those enrolled to cope with any curricular challenges; the project will provide remedial classes to Syrian and Lebanese children aged 6-15. The lessons will take place within the participating schools and the teachers are selected from the usual school staff and asked to work additional hours in exchange for extra income and trainings. During the summer months, when they are usually free, they will continue to provide these services in a "summer day camp" format, together with the PSS and recreational activities available.



4) Community outreach.

This component aims at improving the children and their families' wellbeing through outreach activities targeting the children's community and their caretakers. Community workers, teachers and other staff will carry out home visits in order to monitor and follow-up the children situation and manage the relation with the families. Syrian and Lebanese parents will benefit from awareness sessions on various topics concerning the psychological, social and health aspects of the child sphere. This activity will be part of a broader initiative aiming to improve the protection environment among the displaced.

Through the design of a psychosocial support programme and the implementation of activities aiming at restore an educational environment the intervention will protect children at risk. Additionally, the project will also seek to empower indirect beneficiaries – such as teachers, local community workers, local youth, and staff of other organisations working in the area – and build their capacities in order to enable them to contribute positively to the programme and their communities.

5) Sustainability.

Even though this is an emergency intervention aimed at providing a quick response to urgent needs of the Syrian displaced community in northern Lebanon, the project includes a focus on sustainable impacts on the local Lebanese context. The intervention will empower the centres and local schools willing to cooperate instead of constructing new spaces. The objective is to enable local institutions and civil society to increase their capacities to engage with and strengthen local development processes.

**This report was produced by
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