

SYRIA CRISIS: GIVING CHILDREN A FUTURE

“An entire generation of children is having its future ripped away” Martha Myers, Country Director in Syria

Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. As we approach the fifth anniversary of the conflict in March, the picture looks bleak for Syrian families. 13.5 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, and over half of the country's pre-war population have been killed or forced to flee their homes, sparking the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

As the brutal conflict wages on with little sign of resolution, children continue to suffer. For the past five years their lives, homes, and families have been torn apart. Across the region, millions of children are deprived of the basic services they need to survive, and many have experienced terrible scenes of violence. Psychological as well as physical scars run deep.

Inside Syria, where 6.5 million people are displaced, children are suffering the most appalling conditions and live in near-constant fear. They are being killed, exploited, and denied basic necessities such as healthcare, food and water. Many who live in besieged areas are at high risk of attack from airstrikes and barrel bombs, as well as suffering from critical restrictions on the delivery of vital humanitarian aid.

For those families who flee the country in search of safety, the vast majority end up in neighbouring countries where food is scarce, education limited, and work opportunities almost non-existent. Children who make the perilous journey further afield to Europe face a multitude of dangers, including abuse, trafficking, and even death – and those who do make it may arrive traumatised by their experiences.

EDUCATION UNDER FIRE



Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

“We ran downstairs and we heard the explosion. It was the second time the school had been hit in a month. I believe I will never be able to go to school again after this. I feel bad because if I can't finish school then I can't become a doctor.”

Maha*, 10 years old

Amid such vast and chaotic upheaval, more than half of Syria's children – a staggering 2.8 million – are missing out on an education. Before the war, almost every child went to school in Syria, and now it's where half of all global attacks on schools occur. In neighbouring countries, public schools are buckling under the pressure of numbers, keeping many Syrian children away.

Schools are regularly forced to suspend activities due to bombing or escalations in conflict nearby – in May last year the local authorities in Aleppo closed all the city's schools due to increased airstrikes, preventing thousands of children from sitting their end of year exams. Many schools have had to move classrooms underground into basements to try and keep children safe.

Common attacks on schools include aerial bombardment, shelling and the use of other explosive devices. Among the most shocking examples reported by the UN occurred in Aleppo in April 2014 where an attack on a primary school left 33 children dead and 40 injured.

There is a real prospect of a lost generation of Syrian children, facing a future of limited opportunity. Children are also at increased risk of human rights abuses, as education protects children from recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence, child labour, and early marriage. When schools are safe from attack and other threats, they can provide an important sense of normalcy that is crucial to a child's development and wellbeing, and can also help provide important safety information and services.

The blatant targeting of innocent children through attacks on schools is compounding an already dire humanitarian crisis. Unchecked, the scale of this disaster will have consequences for children that will last a lifetime, and for Syria that will last for generations to come. Even when the conflict is finally resolved, the country may never recover from the devastation of war without an educated population to rebuild it. Poverty and hopelessness will leave it vulnerable to extremism and renewed violence – with potentially profound implications for the region and the wider world.

For children in Syria, every aspect of their lives has become a conflict, not least the daily battle for an education. But our experience shows that with the right resources, it is possible to provide education to Syrian children and safeguard their future.



A CHANCE TO RESTORE CHILDREN'S FUTURES

On 4 February, Heads of State and Government will arrive in London for the 'Supporting Syria and the Region' summit, just one month before the fifth year anniversary of the Syria conflict. At this meeting, they will have an unprecedented opportunity to renew the peace process and restore the future for millions of children. We're calling on world leaders to:

- **Commit to invest in getting every Syrian child back into education and learning by the 2016-2017 school year.** This funding must provide both short-term humanitarian support, as well as multi-year investment in the provision of educational services. This will strengthen and improve access to existing education systems, as well as providing non-formal education opportunities to children for whom the formal system is inaccessible.
- **Make sure classrooms are protected, in a country where there are more attacks on schools than anywhere else in the world.** Stakeholders with influence over armed forces must call for the immediate cessation of attacks against educational facilities, staff, and students, as well as an immediate and lasting stop to the military use of school buildings. The Syrian, Iraqi and other Governments should express a clear political commitment to protect students and teachers from attack and schools from military use by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.
- **Work towards a peaceful end to this senseless destruction of children's lives once and for all.** The international community should continue to urge all parties to the conflict to greater respect of international humanitarian law, condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas acknowledging that civilians, and in particular children, must be protected, and to push for a negotiated solution to the conflict.

We know that the only way to stop children's suffering for good is to end the conflict, which is why this summit is so important. But until this lasting solution is found, our humanitarian response is protecting thousands of the most vulnerable children and helping them fulfil their potential.

OUR RESPONSE SO FAR

Despite the enormous challenges, it is still possible to deliver education in Syria with the right political will and resources. So far we've helped over 36,800 children inside Syria continue their education by ensuring they've gone back to school, and we're aiming to assist another 23,400 children this year. Here's how:

We have supported 55 schools in Syria. As well as supporting teachers, rehabilitating damaged classrooms and providing schools with water and sanitation facilities, we've distributed thousands of school bags, teaching materials, safety equipment, and recreational kits which include sports equipment, art supplies, games, musical instruments and story books.

To improve the quality of education and to promote children's wellbeing, we've trained more than 1,000 teachers. This training includes making sure they have the skills to support distressed children, to keep children as safe as possible while in school, and to adapt lessons in the event of conflict.

Across the wider region, we're also:

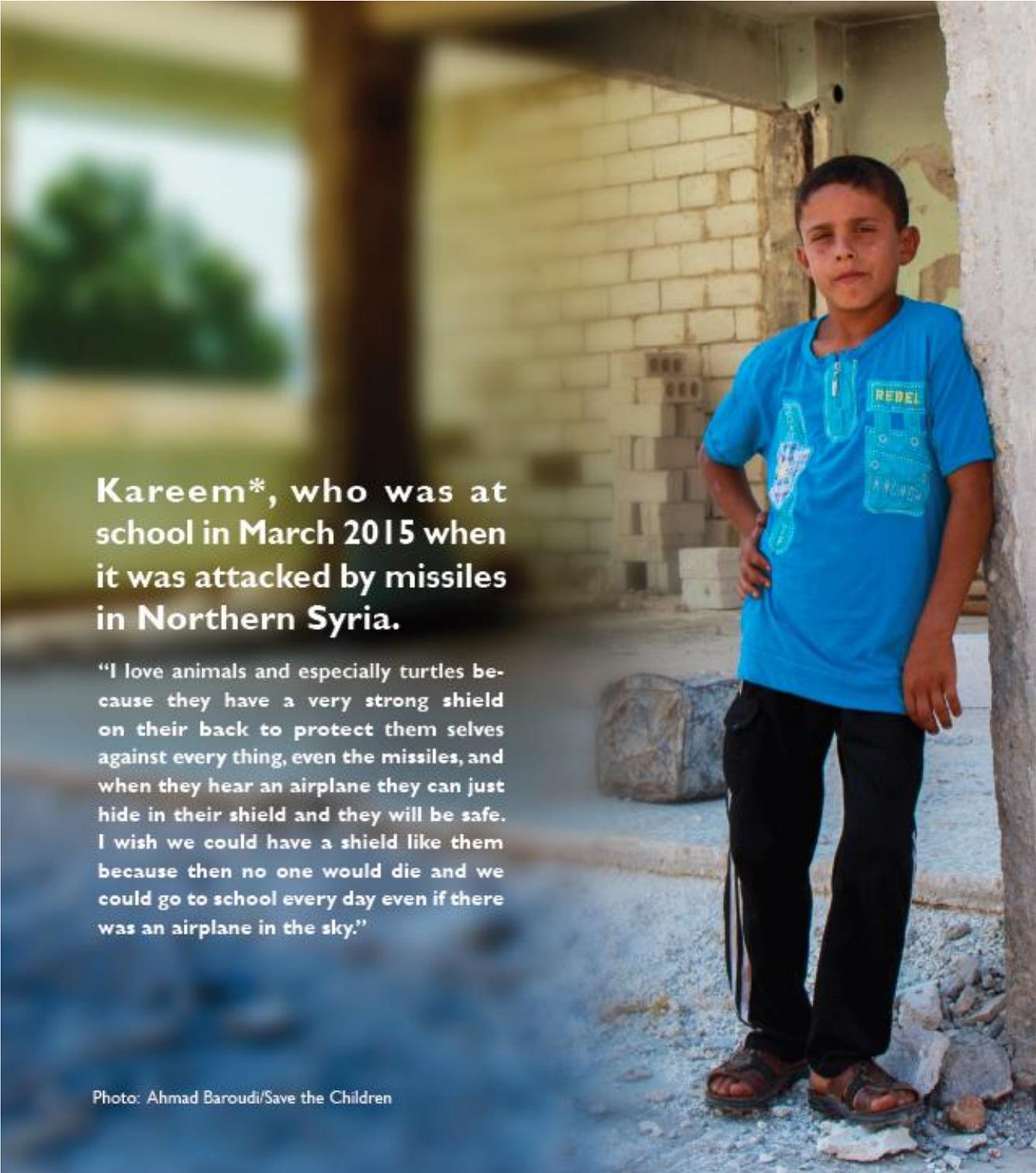
- **Running informal education activities** in all of our child-friendly spaces and activity centres so that children can learn, wherever they are
- **Helping families** to understand the local education system and register their children in school
- **Providing regular catch-up classes**, sessions for toddlers, and mother and baby sessions. We're also constructing additional learning spaces, and managing book banks so child refugees can read at home
- **Providing school kits** to newly-displaced children to help them start studying again. We're also training schoolteachers on child safeguarding, and have developed a policy and code of conduct for teachers and children
- **Running alternative learning programs** and informal education classes for adolescents.

Our response is helping preserve the futures of thousands of children. But there's much more we can do with your support. We must act now to safeguard Syria's future.



Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

Khalid,* 7, who lost his hand when his school was attacked. When the children were taking their break in the schoolyard, two missiles fell on the school. One fell just outside the school's gate, killing five children and injuring fifty more. The other missile fell on the teachers' room, killing three teachers and injuring six others.



Kareem*, who was at school in March 2015 when it was attacked by missiles in Northern Syria.

"I love animals and especially turtles because they have a very strong shield on their back to protect themselves against everything, even the missiles, and when they hear an airplane they can just hide in their shield and they will be safe. I wish we could have a shield like them because then no one would die and we could go to school every day even if there was an airplane in the sky."

Photo: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The only way to end the suffering for good is to end the conflict. However, while a political solution is still being sought, your support will help secure Syria's children a better future.

\$20,000 could fund the construction of one temporary school structure, providing a much-needed safe space for children to continue learning.

\$100 could pay for one refugee child to attend our Accelerated Learning Program where they can catch up on the education they've missed.

Any amount you can **give** could help protect and educate Syria's children and provide them with a better future.

Donate: savethechildren.ca/Syria

Save the Children Canada, February 2016

*Names changed to protect identity