



## July 2015

A Freedom of Information request by [Reprive has revealed that British combat pilots embedded within US, Canadian and French armed forces have been bombing targets inside Syria](#). The revelation that UK forces have been carrying out bombing operations in Syria is highly controversial as David Cameron promised no airstrikes would be carried out in Syria without a democratic mandate through a House of Commons vote.

Meanwhile, this July update covers Syrian activists and the refugee crisis. There are also useful links to the podcast on ISIS, how you can use virtual reality devices to see what the streets of Syria look like today, and getting ready for Day of the Disappeared on 30 August.

### Syrians Overwhelmingly Call for Freedom and Rights for All



The [Syrian Freedom Charter](#) was recently presented at Amnesty UK revealing the voices and values of the Syrian people. Loosely based on the South African Freedom Charter of 1955, the Charter was originally envisioned as a national unity document. In developing the Charter, The Foundation to Restore Equality and Education in Syria (FREE-Syria), worked with more than 100 Syrian activists from the Local Coordination Committees (LCC) in Syria and other grassroots organizations to carry out a survey to answer a fundamental question; "What do Syrians want?"

Over a 4-month period, activists inside Syria conducted more than 50,000 surveys of average Syrians across the country.

The number of respondents was proportional based on each "mouhafaza" or governorate. The survey teams also contacted refugees and expatriates in the region and the US.

At the end of the project, FREE-Syria, the LCC, and independent activists compiled the survey results into the [Freedom Charter document](#) (attached to the Syria update email), which shows that Syrians overwhelmingly want:

- ✓ An inclusive state based on equality and justice for all, in which individual rights and freedoms are protected against discrimination
- ✓ An independent judiciary and armed forces empowered only to protect Syria's borders not interfere in political, economic or social life
- ✓ A state based on the rule of law, and in which people may choose their political leaders
- ✓ All Syrians are equal in their rights and duties, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or gender
- ✓ Freedom of opinion and expression, Freedom of assembly
- ✓ Freedom of religion and religious practice
- ✓ Women's rights protected: The right to an education, and the right to work, the right to vote, to run for office, to grant citizenship to their children

**The Syrian Freedom Charter can be a great tool for talking about what people in Syria really want and grassroots activism towards a future democratic Syrian state which protects human rights. It is helpful for challenging current narrative about Syria beyond the narrow notion that the only real options for a future Syria are the brutal Islamic State or a return to the Assad police state. There's also [YouTube video](#) online of the event and presentation by Raif Jouejati, Director of FREE-Syria and English spokeswoman for LCCs in Syria.**



## Syria Update

### Syrian Refugees

Activists around the UK have been campaigning tirelessly on the Syrian refugee resettlement issue. We've been raising this issue through protest actions, the #OpenToSyria online photo action, lobbying local councils to find places for Syrian families, and writing to MPs and Government ministers. Here are a few facts and figures which may be useful if you're talking about Syrian refugees.



- There are 3.8 million Syrian refugees now sheltering in the region; Egypt (137,000), Lebanon (1.7 m), Turkey (1.6 m), Jordan (622,000) and Iraq (235,000).
- The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is now equivalent to a quarter of Lebanon's population prior to the Syrian crisis. The situation there is particularly difficult and Lebanon is now restricting access into the country for refugees fleeing Syria.
- The UN says that 380,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees need resettling in countries outside the region; vulnerable people are identified when registering as refugees with the UN and they are usually female headed households, survivors of torture, people with serious medical needs or disabilities, and LGBTQ people. However, only around 100,000 resettlement places have been offered globally so far
- The 1951 Refugee Convention was developed in response to the refugee crisis created by WWII and the concept of international burden sharing is integral to the Convention which recognises that states must collectively and globally share responsibility for refugees in such crisis times.
- Refugees have a lack of access to employment, education, healthcare and psychosocial support. There have been cases in Egypt and Turkey where refugees have been deported back to Syria in contravention of international law.
- Entering Europe: Syrians are crossing into Bulgaria and Hungary overland through Turkey (as shown in The Dublin Pitfall film) or via boat in the Mediterranean and reaching Italy and Greece. In 2014 an estimated 3,000 Syrians died in the Mediterranean making the journey to Europe.
- Sweden (2,700) and Germany (35,000) have offered the majority of European resettlement places
- The UK promised to take 'several hundred' of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, but just 187 have arrived so far. However there are recent precedents for special refugee resettlement programmes in the UK; The UK government admitted 12,000 Iraqis between 1991 and 2001, 14,000 Iraqis between 2003 and 2013 and over 4,000 Kosovars in 1996
- There have been around 6,000 asylum applications by Syrians in the UK since the crisis. The UK Government recently tightened up visa rules, apparently in order to prevent "abuse" of the system. Now Syrians travelling through the UK have to apply for a special transit visa, 60% of which are refused.

[Hardship, Hope and Resettlement: Refugees from Syria](#) Amnesty report (4 Feb 2015) which tells the personal stories of several Syrian refugees who are considered vulnerable and in need of resettlement

[Left Out in the Cold: Syrian Refugees Abandoned by the International Community](#) (Amnesty, 5 Dec 2014)

[Resettlement and Other Forms of Admission for Syrian Refugees](#) (UNHCR, 29 June 2015)



## Syria Update

### Day of the Disappeared: 30 August

If you're holding a local event or have a stall in late August, consider using the opportunity to highlight the enforced disappearances since 2012 of Khalil Ma'touq and Ali Mahmoud Othman.

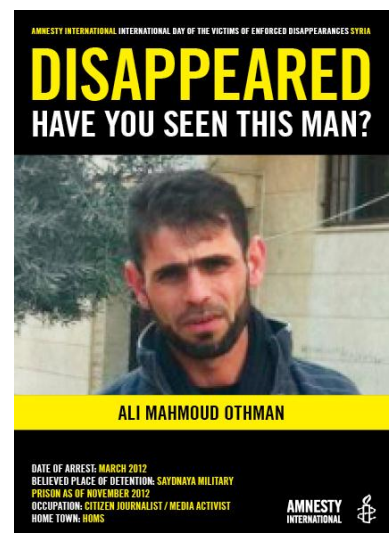
#### Khalil Ma'touq

According to his family and colleagues, human rights lawyer Khalil Ma'touq set off to drive to work on 2 October 2012, with his friend Mohammed Thatha. They never arrived. Khalil Ma'touq's home is in Sahnaya, a suburb roughly 20km south of the centre of Damascus. Given Khalil's work as a human rights lawyer and the fact that there are several government-controlled checkpoints on his usual route to his office in the city, there were immediately concerns that he had been arrested by the security forces. Amnesty believes that Khalil Ma'touq has been arbitrarily detained and subjected to enforced disappearance and considers him a prisoner of conscience.

#### Ali Mahmoud Othman

Ali Mahmoud Othman is a citizen journalist from Homs – an individual who took up reporting on the situation in Syria in the absence of reports by professional domestic and foreign journalists, due to restrictions imposed by the Syrian authorities. He was arrested in March 2012 in Aleppo province and remains held incommunicado in conditions which amount to an enforced disappearance. Amnesty considers Ali Mahmoud Othman to be at risk of torture and to be a prisoner of conscience.

- **If you are planning to organise a stall for Day of the Disappeared, I can provide you with some background info sheets on Khalil Ma'Touq and / or Ali Mahmoud Othman. I've also recently been working with a group who are using virtual reality headsets to highlight the work of citizen journalists and media activists in Syria, which fits in well with promoting Ali Othman's case. Just drop me and email or give me a call to discuss how this might work**



### Virtual Reality Devices Show Syria's Barrel Bombed Streets



Amnesty have recently been using virtual reality (VR) headsets to show what the devastated street of war-torn Aleppo look like.

They've been used on the streets by Amnesty fundraisers with reports back from the fundraisers that they were talking to a lot more people than usual, with people stopping to take part in virtual reality experience.

One street fundraiser, Nina Franklin, said: "It's been a real treat being the first team to use the VR headsets. It really reminds us why we're out there in the first place. The



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headsets are so immersive because you can't help draw comparisons between the street you're in and the street you see. The VR sets anchor everything: statistics, emotions, stories. Suddenly everything 'over there' is so vivid and real."

The highly cost-effective project uses inexpensive refurbished smartphones and low-tech virtual reality headsets (costing less than £15 each). The photographs have been taken by a group of Syrian citizen journalists known as Lamba Media Productions, who have been documenting the destruction caused by barrel bombing and other attacks on the besieged city of Aleppo.

Highly destructive Syrian government barrel bombs have had an overwhelming impact on the people still living in Aleppo, and campaigners believe that a 360-degree imaging of the impact areas communicates the reality of their use like no other photograph or video can. The project is currently visuals-only, but future designs are likely to incorporate audio, text-rich annotations and film.

I've personally taken the VR sets to recent talks on Syria at Amnesty groups and they've been really powerful in helping people, including myself, to really understand the devastation in Syria.

- **We can arrange for Amnesty groups to borrow VR headsets – I'd recommend them for using on stalls or at events as they're really useful for engaging people. I think we can also use them really effectively to highlight the case of Ali Mahmoud Othman (see above). Please drop me an email or call me and we can arrange this.**

## Amnesty Call for UN Arms Embargo Against Syrian Government

Amnesty used the rare opportunity of a UN Security Council meeting with NGOs in June to call for an arms embargo on the Syrian Government.

In a recent report, Amnesty highlighted the [devastation and horror caused in Aleppo by barrel bombs](#) - unguided, locally-produced explosive bombs dropped by Syrian government helicopters. The report concluded that barrel bombings were part of a widespread attack against the civilian population in furtherance of a state policy and therefore these attacks amount to crimes against humanity. Barrel bombings continue to take place regularly across Syria. Recently barrel bombs destroyed a Médecins Sans Frontières facility at Busra hospital in Dera'a.

Amnesty is urging the Security Council to impose an arms embargo on the Syrian government (it has already imposed arms embargoes on the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra armed groups) and targeted sanctions against individuals on all sides responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Such measures could help end barrel bomb and "hell-canon" attacks against civilians as well as the use of chlorine and other toxic chemicals.

## Country coordinator vacancy

If you're interested in a volunteer role as a country specialist with Amnesty UK you can [find out more information here](#).





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### Resources

Click the links to access these resources online and feel free to send me any others you're aware of.

[ISIS in a nutshell](#): 30 minute podcast explaining ISIS's formation and strategy

[Voices in Crisis](#): A monthly insight into the human rights crisis in Syria. (PDF attached to email– June 2015) This issue focuses on journalists in Syria.

[Voices in Crisis](#): A monthly insight into the human rights crisis in Syria. (PDF attached to email – May 2015) This issue focuses on violations by the Islamic State in the Hasakah Area of Syria.

['Death Everywhere': War Crimes and Human Rights Abuses in Aleppo](#) Amnesty report (5 May 2015)

[Al-Raqqa Under Attack: Syrian Air Force Strikes Against Civilians](#) Amnesty report 17 March 2015

[Hardship, Hope and Resettlement: Refugees from Syria](#) Amnesty report (4 Feb 2015) which tells the personal stories of several Syrian refugees who are considered vulnerable and in need of resettlement

[Facts and Figures: Syria Refugee Crisis and international resettlement](#) (webpage - 5 December 2014)

[Left Out in the Cold: Syrian Refugees Abandoned by the International Community](#) (Report – 5 December 2014)

Syria's Forgotten Cities (Syria Solidarity Movement UK website): Find out more about cities in Syria and how they're coping <http://www.syriasforgottencities.org/>

[Free Syrian Voices campaign](#) – Information on civil society activists, media and medical workers targeted for their work

### Actions You Can Take

1. Start planning an event or action for Day of the Disappeared (30 August) where you can highlight the disappearance and detention of Khalil Ma'touq and Ali Mahmoud Othman. I have a background crib sheet for both and petition sheets.
2. Download and listen to the [ISIS in a nutshell](#) podcast (30 mins) and discuss afterwards with your group
3. Get involved with the #OpenToSyria campaign by taking part in the photo action with your groups and friends. All the info and resources you need is here: <http://opentosyria.tumblr.com/>
4. Organise a film screening in your area highlighting the situation in Syria or Syrian refugees – email me for a list of films and documentaries

***Written a letter? Organised an event or a stall on Syria? Please let me know what actions you've taken so Amnesty UK can understand what campaigning activities are taking place and plan ahead better!***

***You can contact me about actions, to arrange a talk of Syria, let me know of events which you running, or simply share information via [hannah.slater@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:hannah.slater@amnesty.org.uk) or on 07583114309. If I don't respond by email please feel free give me a call, it's often easier for me to discuss by phone.***