

#360Syria - Virtual Aleppo:

Information on virtual reality headsets with images from Aleppo



360° Syria: Using virtual reality to shine a light on war crimes

Barrel bombs – oil drums, fuel tanks or gas cylinders filled with explosives and metal fragments, plunged from helicopters – are illegal weapons that have killed thousands of civilians in Syria since 2012. Civilians are being bombarded in their homes, schools, hospitals, public markets, and places of worship, but the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, denies using barrel bombs at all.

Amnesty International UK have developed a more memorable and immersive way to bring people closer to the situation in Syria to garner greater understanding and empathy with the Syrian people. Syrian activists, trained by Amnesty International UK, have supplied 360 spherical images taken using smartphones. Those images are then sent to Amnesty from Syria where they are shared with the public using cheap and simple virtual reality headsets, providing a 360-degree immersive experience to highlight the devastation caused by these indiscriminate weapons and the resilience of people trying to survive and the activists documenting the daily atrocities. These spherical images form part of an enduring body of evidence of human rights violations.

Using virtual reality headsets, we can offer people a powerful immersive experience – transporting them from the streets of Britain to the devastated streets of war-torn Syria.

People can also view the images on their desktop or mobile device at 360syria.com.

As part of the project, we're working to empower and mobilise peaceful Syrian activists to help them develop an independent civil society and create a future where human rights are respected. We're providing equipment and training using the latest

photographic equipment, allowing them to capture high-quality 360° images with the touch of a button, and ensuring that their work is seen by the rest of the world.

The photos have been taken by a group of Syrian citizen journalists called Lamba Media Productions, who have been documenting the destruction caused by barrel bombing and other attacks on the besieged cities of Aleppo and Damascus.

Tips for using Virtual Reality headsets at your events

General

- Get one or two of your group's member to try it out before taking them to your event, make sure they are confident with using the technology
- Think about the events, festivals, etc. where you can use them
- Ask if people suffer from vertigo or epilepsy before allowing them to use the viewer
- Make sure you have some info on the Syria campaign to discuss
- Test the kit before passing to a member of the public
- Ensure that one person is accountable for looking after each phone and headset. They need to be charged every day and you may wish to consider the use of portable chargers.
- If you have more than one headsets, number each headset and phone (including the unique IMEI code) and keep a record of who is looking after it.
- The headsets do cost Amnesty some money. Please look after them!

Phones

- You don't need sim cards.
- If you're just showing the still images (recommended) and not the 360Syria.com website, you don't need Wi-Fi or internet access.
- We've set up a dummy Amnesty Google login, but there's no bank details or other personal details on the phone
- Regularly clean screens
- Only use one strong photo and get to know that image very well
- Make sure you have powerful stories to bring the image to life (see below **IMAGES**). What was it like before the bombing? How did people live? How have people been affected? What sounds were there before? What sounds are there now? Tell a story of one person's struggle? The story of the person who took the photo?
- Put phone on standby/screen off by touching power button once to save battery when not in use – this will also avoid the screens getting hot
- Keep the phone free of other software/apps/photos so that it is only used for AIUK human rights work

Headsets

- Making sure eye lenses are set at correct and equal distance apart from each other and distance from phone to avoid blur. Lenses set furthest apart is best for most people. If these are wrongly set or unequal, it can be a dissatisfying blurry experience. **The images should be crystal clear and not blurry in any way.**
- Keep the lenses and the inside of the viewer clean and dust free
- If people wear glasses, they can try viewing with or without them depending on their site

MATERIALS & ACTIONS

Virtual reality headsets on loan

A refurbished smartphone and a simple plastic virtual reality viewer that the phone sits in. (Please note that your group is responsible for safe keeping and return of the VR headsets.)

Posters

420mm x 220mm

Stickers

125mm x 62mm (6-up on an A4 sheet)

Action: What you can do to help reduce the suffering in Syria

Please contact your MP, asking them to write to the Foreign Secretary, to ensure the UK champions human rights benchmarks at the Syrian talks in Geneva and lobbies parties to the conflict to end unlawful attack against civilians and civilian objects.

See more at:

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/syria_action_april_-_october_2016.pdf

The above materials can be ordered by phoning Community Organising Team on 020 7033 1675 or by e-mail at activism@amnesty.org.uk

Useful links:

- The 360 Syria website: <http://www.360syria.com/>
- AIUKs Syria page: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/Syria>
- Blog about the project: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/ether/360-syria-media-activists-war-crimes-barrel-bombs>
- Blog by one of the media activists: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/global-voices/i-want-you-know-what-assad-regime-doing-people-syria>
- Wider reading on Syria from AIUKs Campaign Manager: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/kristyan-benedict>

- Article about the VR street fundraising launch: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/shining-light-syria-virtual-reality>
- Media coverage and video of the use of VR for street fundraising: <http://www.brandrepublic.com/article/1350193/watch-amnesty-uses-vr-headsets-transform-london-aleppo>

IMAGES

The best image in our opinion is this one: <https://goo.gl/photos/SuQoV5D88YDEVXma6> (click on image to view in 360 mode).

Image depicts a residential district in Aleppo called Al Sha'ar which was targeted by Syrian government barrel bombs. Here's more info:

- All the buildings, except for the Mosque are residential buildings – nobody lives in them now, the buildings are clearly not safe.
- This was once a bustling and vibrant community of mostly 'working class' hard working people
- There was once an estimated 250,000 families living in Al Sha'ar, the number of families that remain are in their 100s
- This area was targeted by the regime with barrel bombs because of its strategic importance. Barrel bombs were used to cause maximum trauma and civilian terror
- Before the bombing you could hear the sound of birds overhead, children laughing and playing on their way to school, small business owners setting up their stalls, now all you hear is the sound of gunfire, bombs and the odd motorcycle. There is no birdsong and very few children here.
- One of the team who took these photos lost his father in a barrel bomb strike, he was there to pull out the remains of his father – instead of picking up a gun in revenge, he chose to pick up a camera in order to make sure the world sees these images. It's our duty to show these images and to share their stories.