

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

**Um Ahmad, Al-Midan**

Source: League for Citizenship, “Syrian Mother” 2017

## Dreaming of a free Syria

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

Soon, when the war ends, we will go back and build our country all together; Sunni, Druze, Christian, Alawi and Kurdish.

We are all Syrians and it our duty to protect Syria and reconstruct it.



**"We will forgive after we hold the people who humiliated us and killed our children accountable."**

**Um Ahmad, Daraya**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## Nothing, nothing

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

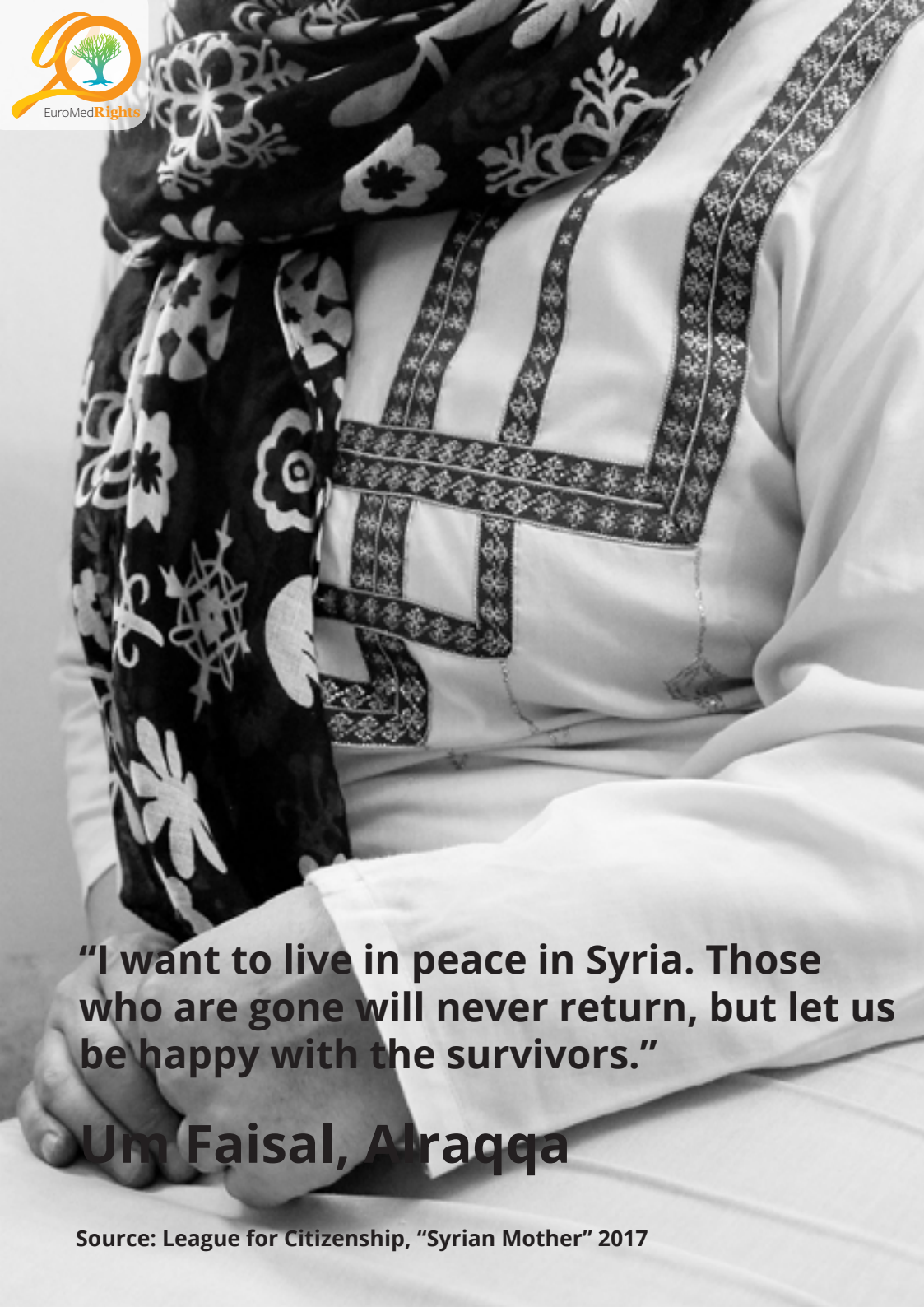
One day, the security forces arrested my first son and killed him under torture a few days later. I never imagined they would treat peaceful protestors with such cruelty and brutality.

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

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

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





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

**Um Faisal, Alraqqa**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## Let Us Live Happily with the Remaining People

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**"I am not sure if I will ever be able to forgive. How can I forgive those who killed my husband, starved my children and displaced us?"**

**Um Hasan, Arbayn/Sweidah**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## This Is Our Story


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

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

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

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

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



**"Syria is a mother who is losing her children every day"**

**Um Jafar, Lattakia**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## Why?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

**Um May, Aleppo**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## What Can I Tell You?

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

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

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


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

We decided to go to Turkey, but on the departure day, she decided to speak and she said: "mom, I do not want to leave. I am fine, and we still have work to do". The moment she spoke was like the first time she said Mom when she was a little girl. I temporarily delayed travel, but the situation exacerbated and we had to leave to Turkey.

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

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





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

**Um Mohammad, Homs**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## **I Will Not Lose Hope**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**“How can we explain the massacres to our children? How will we return the smile to their faces?”**

**Um Nofal, Hama**

Source: League for Citizenship, “Syrian Mother” 2017

## Where to Start?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





**“I hope to see Syria [after the victory of the revolution] as a state of law and justice, a civil state where we achieve our aspirations. »**

**Hiba Rif, Damascus**

Source: League for Citizenship, “Syrian Mother” 2017

## **Unfortunately, our Dreams Have Been Stolen**

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

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


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

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

After I got out of prison, I knew the informer who reported on me but I have never thought about revenge. I’m sure that one day he will receive punishment.

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

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



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

**Sahar Hasan, Al Hassakeh**

Source: League for Citizenship, "Syrian Mother" 2017

## **She Will Come Back Tomorrow**

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

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

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

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

Days went by, the situation deteriorated and armed groups appeared with different names. Al Nusra came first, and then arrived ISIS and imposed Hijab on us, prevented smoking and tightened their grip on people's lives so they started fleeing. However, I could not leave because I had hoped that my sister would return and because of my nieces that I had to take care of. In September, life was no longer possible and elders felt that the town should be evacuated after they assured us that the road is safe.

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

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

I, as a mother and a Syrian citizen, hope that peace will return to our country. I hope the blood of our children and our tears will not go in vain.

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