The Syrian Catastrophe

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• Why is no one doing anything?
• How do I approach this?
• What is the context?
• What is my role in this?
• How do I make a positive impact?
Who Are the Syrians?

- The inhabitants of the Syrian Arab Republic
- Our ancestors share a common Levantine Semitic ancestry
- Shared ancestry with the Romans, Greeks, Armenians, Turcomen, Persians, Arabs
- The Syrian republic had a population of 23,000,000
Language & Religions

Languages

• All Syrians speak Arabic
• Kurdish
• Aramaic

Religions

• Muslims: 75% Sunni  5% Shia
• Alawis: 8%
• Christians: 11%
• Druzes: 1%
Story of Syria

• Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years (1500s-1900s).

• Under the French colonial rule (1918-1946).

• In 1970, the Syrian Secretary of Defense, Hafez al-Assad, seized power.

• In 1971 Hafez al-Assad made himself president.
• He belongs to the Alawite sect, and his policies favored that sect and assured the allegiance of its members to him.

• He created a legislative body, introduced a new constitution, and made elections to keep him in power and ensure the dominance of his party.

• Under the Assad regime, opposition was harshly suppressed.
• In 2000, after 30 years of rule, Hafez al-Assad passed away and was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad.

• Bashar al-Assad remains in power today.

• He is a British-trained eye doctor.

• Under Bashar al-Assad, authoritarian rule under one party and one ruler continued.

• Like his father, Assad favored the Alawite sect politically and economically. He placed family members in positions of power.
The 2011 uprising began as peaceful protests after the government arrested and tortured schoolchildren who had written anti-government graffiti on a wall in Daraa.

The protestors called for:
- democratic reforms
- the lifting of Emergency Law in place since 1963,
- the release of political prisoners,
- multiparty elections,
- and some Syrians called for the end of the regime.
• The Syrian government responded to the demonstrations with
  - widespread arrests
  - beatings by government forces,
  - brutal interrogations and torture,
  - use of snipers to terrify and kill street protestors.
• The people, however, remained on the streets and began organizing in different ways against the regime.

• Since the start of the crisis, the Syrian government has referred to protesters and their family members as terrorists.

• In Summer 2011, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was formed primarily by defectors from the Syrian military to liberate Syria from the Assad regime.
Types of Trauma Syrians have witnessed..

- Mass displacement
- Daily violence
- Torture
- Humiliation
- Death of loved ones
- Rape
A refugee is a person who is outside of his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.
FROM BARREL BOMBS

TO DEATH BOATS
U.N.: “Syrian Refugee Crisis is the biggest Humanitarian Emergency of our Era”
DO NUMBERS MATTER?

MORE THAN 200 CIVILIANS KILLED IN ONE WEEK OF AIRSTRIKES

-THE SYRIAN OBSERVATORY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

#AleppolsBurning
• How Syria’s Death Toll Is Lost in the Fog of War; New York Times

• UN: No more words to describe what’s happening in Syria.

• Russia & China Veto
• Denying access to health care has been a tactic of war.

• The medical situation in East Ghouta is a humanitarian disaster. More than 600 patients require urgent medical evacuation as there is no treatment available for them in the besieged area. More than a third are children. In the last six months, 19 patients on the medical evacuation list have passed away because they could not access care. Malnutrition is the highest ever seen in the Syrian conflict.
• From February 19 to 28, SAMS has recorded 595 deaths in East Ghouta due to the horrific escalation of aerial attacks. Over half of those killed are women and children. Over 3,000 have been injured.

• The recent chemical attack on April 8 marks the fourth use of a chemical weapon in East Ghouta this year, and the seventh in Syria this year.
• Almost 400,000 people live in #EastGhouta, including more than 95,000 children under the age of 12. From Feb 19 - 25, over 500 have been killed, half of whom are women & children. #SaveGhouta

• 25 attacks on health care facilities in #EastGhouta from Feb 19 -25. Over 3,000 injured. Healthcare in East Ghouta is being systematically attacked to prevent them from receiving lifesaving care. #SaveGhouta

• Acute malnutrition cases amongst children is rampant in #EastGhouta. Children have no access to micronutrients and necessary treatments. #SaveGhouta
• “We hear every half hour that someone has died in Ghouta, or that there is a massacre that took place somewhere in Ghouta,” “The children here are afflicted with hallucinations because of the sounds of explosions. Death is the master of the situation, either death by starving, or fear, or bombardment, or lack of medicine.”

• Bayan Rehan, a member of Douma local Council
“The homeland is not a geographical territory. It is the people who have left with us, those who will stay by our side, and who we shall stay by theirs.”

Um Samih
What we need to know..

- Ongoing crisis
- Fear for family members
- Safety vs. Guilt for leaving the country
- Scattered families
- Social- Political Story

  Understanding the principles and values of freedom and justice for which a war is fought.

- It is NOT a civil war
How you can help..

• Spread awareness about the genocides in Syria

• Support Syrians in their demands:

  1. removing the root cause of war
     Bashar Al Assad

  2. having no fly zone to protect civilians

  3. increase the number of refugees to the US

  . Volunteer with SCN to support Syrian refugees here

  . Donate
• Call, write to, or meet with your Member of Congress. Demand that your representative hold those responsible accountable for committing war crimes accountable and call for the protection of civilians against ALL weapons.

• Organize events, vigils, or rallies on behalf of the Syrian people show them that the world is standing with them.

• Write an Op-Ed to submit to your local media.

• Send a letter, or tweet at your local newspaper or broadcast news network, asking them to feature East Ghouta more prominently in their reporting, and on their websites.
Nivin Hotary wrote from Ghouta this morning:

“This could be my last post. The catastrophic situation is now well-known to all... we have said all we could say. A criminal regime that kills its own people with the approval and support and sponsorship of other countries. Yesterday was an indescribable day. Chlorine and cluster bombs, barrel bombs, and rocket shells. They tried everything to bury us alive in the basements. No words left for us to say and no conscience or humanity left in those remaining silent and allowing this to happen. The last thing I want to say to all people everywhere: our regime is murderous and won’t escape justice. But your governments are more murderous than the regime. They are watching and remaining quiet, acquiescing. And those who accuse us of being terrorists are doing so to relieve their conscience... The Syrian regime might kill us all – how would you ever make peace with that? I salute all women of the world on International Women’s Day, and I extend my condolences to our women for such a shameful world. 8/3/2018 Day 18 in the basements #Ghouta”