



UNTOLD ATROCITIES

THE STORIES OF SYRIA'S CHILDREN



Save the Children

“I WAS AT A FUNERAL WHEN I HEARD
THE ROCKET THAT CAUSED A MASSACRE.
DEAD BODIES AND INJURED PEOPLE
WERE SCATTERED ON THE GROUND,
AND I FOUND BODY PARTS.”

HASSAN, 14

Front cover photo: One-year-old Manal at Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan. She's one of thousands of children who have fled across Syria's border to escape an increasingly brutal conflict.

All photos: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children unless otherwise stated

SAVE THE CHILDREN WORKS IN MORE THAN 120 COUNTRIES.
WE SAVE CHILDREN'S LIVES. WE FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS.
WE HELP THEM FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

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“I knew a boy called Ala'a. He was only six years old. He didn't understand what was happening. I'd say that six-year-old boy was tortured more than anyone else in the room. He wasn't given food or water for three days, and he was so weak he used to faint all the time. He was beaten regularly. I watched him die. He only survived for three days and then he simply died. He was terrified all the time. They treated his body as though he was a dog.”

WAEEL, 16

This sickening account is the testimony of a 16-year-old boy. What he has witnessed is beyond shocking – it's a scandal – and will inevitably stay with Wael forever. But every day in Syria's brutal war, children are experiencing and witnessing the most unspeakable atrocities.

We know this because we are working in the refugee camps and communities that are now home to thousands of children and their families fleeing the escalating violence.

We have spoken to children and their parents, and we have heard their stories.

This report is the product of those interviews. It is filled with the testimonies of children who have seen and suffered senseless acts of torture and violence. They have been shelled and shot at, and seen their loved ones killed. Every day, more young lives are torn apart.

“You can't imagine what I've seen. What Syria has seen... Please help us. I am asking people around the world who can, please help us,” 12-year-old Ali told us.

We have published this report so the voices of the children themselves can be heard. We must listen and act.

Justin Forsyth, Chief Executive, Save the Children

INTRODUCTION

As Syria's civil war has intensified, thousands of children have died in brutal attacks and many more have been injured, traumatised or forced to flee their homes. Boys and girls continue to be killed, maimed and tortured. These appalling violations against children must stop and those carrying them out held to account.

Save the Children is helping children recover from their horrific experiences. We have spoken with children in refugee camps on the borders of Syria who have experienced and witnessed crimes, and collected their stories in an effort to highlight how children continue to suffer in Syria. This collection of testimonies from children and parents paints a disturbing picture of the horrors that children have been through during this conflict.

Almost every child we've spoken to has seen family members killed. Others tell of being caught up in atrocities, witnessing massacres or being tortured. They have seen and experienced things that no child should ever see, and many are deeply traumatised as a result. Their testimonies also corroborate violations documented by the UN, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in recent months. The acts described are consistent, recurring and appalling.

Every crime against children must be recorded to send a clear message to all sides in the conflict that these atrocities will not be tolerated. The UN is already recording and investigating crimes against children, but it needs more resources across the region to properly document every crime.

Following the UN Security Council's open debate on children and armed conflict on 19 September, the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict has been formally triggered for Syria. This mechanism enables the UN to put verified accounts of violations against children directly in front of the Security Council, raising them to the highest level. But the first step is acknowledging the horrors that children have experienced in Syria.

This collection of testimonies* gives a voice to the silent victims of Syria's ongoing civil war.

* The stories come from face-to-face interviews conducted by Save the Children staff with children and adults we're working with on the borders of Syria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STOP THE CRIMES AGAINST SYRIA'S CHILDREN

The UN needs to increase its presence on the ground so that it can properly document every crime. All sides in the conflict must know that crimes against children will be exposed to the world. **Sign our petition** and ask UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to ensure that the UN and its member states are deploying all the resources necessary to count every crime against Syria's children.

HELP US REBUILD SHATTERED YOUNG LIVES

Save the Children is already working in refugee camps and communities on the borders of Syria, helping children fleeing the devastation. They are arriving frightened and traumatised. Our teams are there to keep them safe, provide basics like food and blankets and most importantly to help them deal with their traumatic experiences. But our funds are running low and we urgently need more support. To find out more and to donate, **click here**.

A group of women and children take shelter in the shade of a tent in the reception area of Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan.





“THEY THOUGHT I WOULD COMMIT SUICIDE,
BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE.”

FARAH, 17

HASSAN

14 YEARS OLD

“THEY CREATE A HUMAN SHIELD OF CHILDREN. I SAW THIS WITH MY OWN EYES.”

I was at a funeral when I first heard the rocket that caused a massacre. I think it was targeting the funeral. My cousin and my uncle died that day.

Dead bodies along with injured people were scattered on the ground. I found body parts all over each other; and when we reached the mosque we found tens and tens of dead bodies there. We started to rescue people in need.

Dogs were eating the dead bodies for two days after the massacre. There were tons of people in the mosques too. They were dead, all of them. I was afraid, of course I was afraid.

I was devastated. I hated my life, and I hated myself. I lost my uncle and my cousin. Me and my cousin used to do everything together, and I lost him – my cousin who used to stand always by my side.

My house was burnt down. Everything was gone. I wanted to run in, but I couldn't – it was still too hot. I looked around and everyone was so devastated, no-one could look at each other.

The children in Syria need help. They need help because they are being tortured, shelled, shot at. They take children and put them in front of them. They create a human shield of children. They know that the people in the town will not shoot their own children. I saw this with my own eyes.

I want children in Syria to escape. They should run away so they don't die in the shelling.

What do I remember of Syria? I remember that whenever shelling took place we ran to a shelter. Inside, children shouted and wept a lot, they were so afraid. I remember that so many children were being tortured.

Because of what is happening in Syria we don't play any more. I miss my house. I miss my neighbourhood. I miss playing football.

I ask the leaders all around the world to save the children in Syria, save them from all the shelling. Children need medicine. We need clothes, and food. Every child should play and be happy. I am worried about the future. What will happen to us? Where will we go?



Hassan is 14 years old and lives with his family in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. He witnessed the aftermath of a massacre in Syria. He now lives with his parents and brothers in one tent in the refugee camp.

KHALID

15 YEARS OLD

“THEY HUNG ME UP FROM THE CEILING BY MY WRISTS, WITH MY FEET OFF THE GROUND. THEN I WAS BEATEN.”

I left Syria because of the constant bombardment, the constant shelling, and the torture. The children are all terrified, they don't understand what's happening.

I was arrested. See these marks? My hands were tied with plastic cord. They were tied so tightly. Children were with me in the cell and their hands were tied in the same way. We'd beg them to untie us, but they would tie the cord tighter.

Some men came to our village. I tried to escape, but they took me to jail. Except it wasn't a jail – it was my old school.

It's ironic – they took me there to torture me, in the same place I used to go to school to learn. My father was actually the principal there. They had taken over the school and made it into a torture centre.

When I realised that was where we were going, I was so sad, I wanted to cry.

I was kept there for ten days. For the first two days, we were forced to stand upright. I was blindfolded and my hands were tied with plastic cord. I still have the scars.

I was terrified. More than 100 of us were kept in a room in the school. One boy was only 12. He was kept in prison for five days. His hands were tied behind him, like me. I remember thinking, “What can he have done? He's a 12-year-old boy.”

After two days I was taken out of the room to be interrogated. I hadn't eaten anything or drunk any water, and I was extremely weak. They hung me up from the ceiling by my wrists, with my feet off the ground, then I was beaten. They wanted us to speak, to confess to something.

Most people only last an hour before they pass out. If you were hung up like that for more than two hours, you'd die.

I passed out. I passed out from the severe pain of hanging like that, and from the beating. They took me down and threw cold water on my face to wake me up. Then they took turns stubbing out their cigarettes on me. Here, I have these scars.

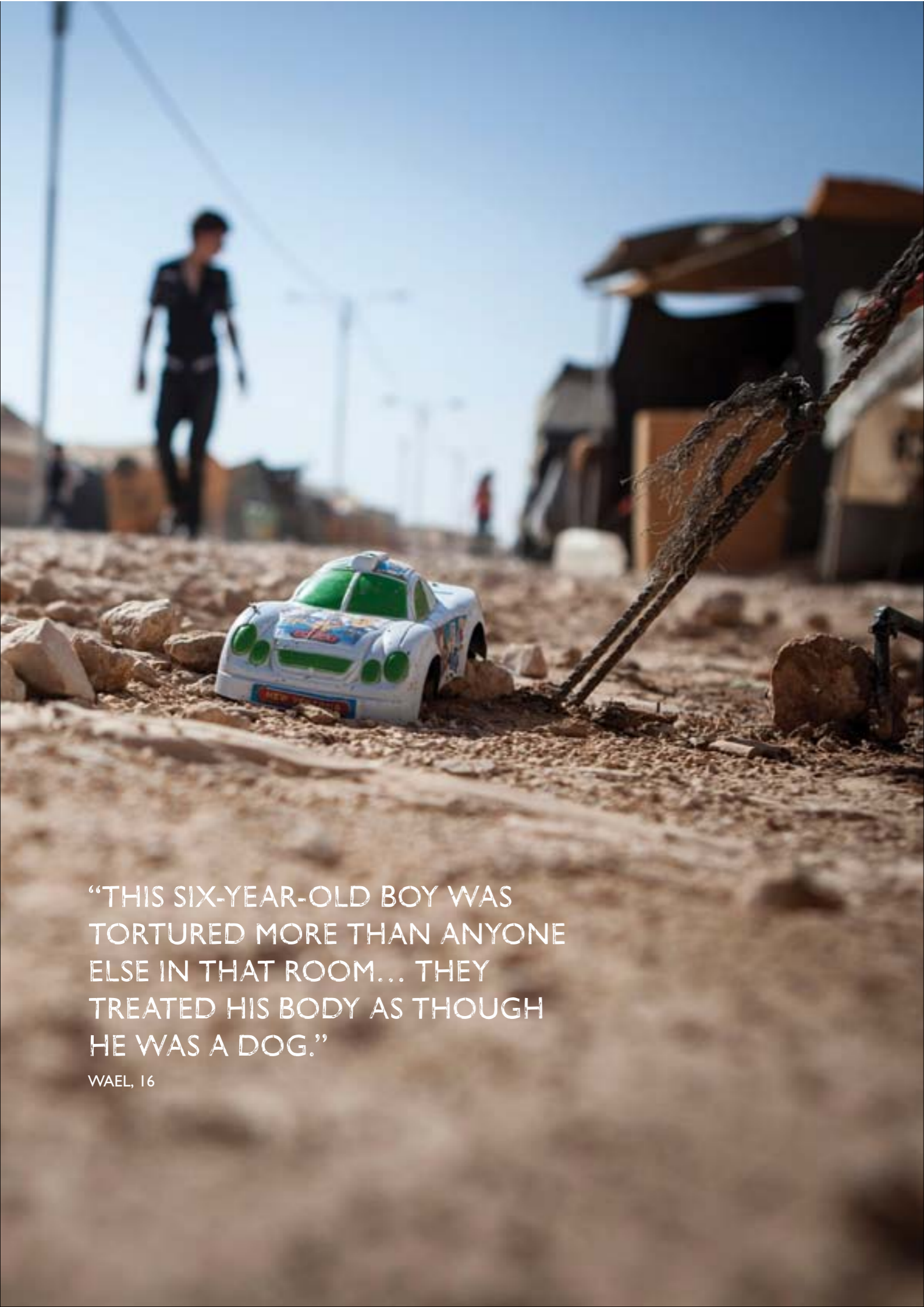
The 12-year-old boy who was with me was hung up too, and had cigarette burns on him. I saw it with my own eyes. Some other people had electricity used on them. I didn't. I don't know why them and not me. I don't think there was a reason – it depended what mood these men were in. They showed no sympathy, no mercy. There were maybe around 70 of them, but I can't be sure.

It's not unusual to see a school used in this way. They've used everything – schools, clinics. The place we went to get medicine from is now used for torture. I was so terrified of that place. I still am.

Another thing they do is to use children to protect themselves. They know we can't shoot our own children, so they put the children in front – so they're a human shield – and march into our villages. It's terrifying for the children. Many of them die.

“THEY HAD TAKEN OVER THE SCHOOL AND MADE IT INTO A TORTURE CENTRE.”





“THIS SIX-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS TORTURED MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THAT ROOM... THEY TREATED HIS BODY AS THOUGH HE WAS A DOG.”

Wael, 16

Wael

16 YEARS OLD

“I HAVE SEEN CHILDREN SLAUGHTERED. I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER BE OK AGAIN.”

I've been here in Za'atari for a month now. Why did I leave? What a question. There's no one left in Syria.

At the beginning we could just about survive. We would go to the shelter, we would hide, and we would live. But now they're using different weapons. Before, the shelters were safe, but now the weapons destroy even those in the basements of houses. I couldn't stand what was happening: the shelling, the destruction, the torture.

At my home in Syria, we dug a hole in the garden to hide in. It was only big enough for three people to crouch in, but whenever we knew that violence was coming, I would climb in there with my brothers. My mother would lead us in and then cover it over with corrugated iron, and throw sand over the top. And we would wait, sometimes for hours.

The last time I was in there it was from 7am to 5pm. It was terrifying – I was so worried that they would find us and kill me and my two brothers. We'd hide in the hole when armed men were walking the streets, and in the basement when shelling happened. The shelling was almost daily. We'd use the hole at least once a week, often on Thursdays. Thursdays are a big day for massacres and crackdowns because prayers on a Friday can be a trigger for protest.

Once, I was arrested along with hundreds of other people. They separated out the children and I was the oldest at 16. I can't tell you how many there were, but there were many. We were forced into a small cell together. There was nowhere to go – there wasn't even a toilet, just a hole in the floor.

There was a group of small children with us whose parents were 'wanted'. There were perhaps 13 children in total. They weren't allowed food or water. When it was time for us to eat, their group was surrounded by armed men who stopped anyone giving them food. These children were too weak to even cry. They just lay on the floor.

They were also subjected to repeated beating with sticks, worse than us. I knew a boy called Ala'a. He was part of that group. He was only six years old. He didn't understand what was happening. His dad was told that his child would die unless he gave himself up. I'd say that this six-year-old boy was tortured more than anyone else in that room. He wasn't given food or water for three days, and he was so weak he used to faint all the time. He was beaten regularly. I watched him die. He only survived for three days and then he simply died. He was terrified all the time. They treated his body as though he was a dog.

I wasn't able to think about anything by then. I thought I'd die in that cell and I couldn't see past that. If they overheard us talking, we were beaten fiercely and repeatedly. So we didn't talk. All we heard was screaming, crying and silence.

When I left that place I felt I'd escaped death. Now, I feel that no one cares about Syria. No one is helping us and we're dying. If there was even 1% of humanity in the world, this wouldn't happen.

I feel as though I'm dying from the inside. At least when I die this will be over. [At this point Wael begins to cry.] Torture is not only physical, it's mental. When you see women and children scream and die, it has an effect. Each and every Syrian has been devastated mentally by this war.

Before, I laughed all the time, now I don't, what do I have to laugh about? Some children from my village have become mute because of what they've seen. Young children are worse. They don't understand why – none of us do, really. They are just sad, terrified children. These children used to be taken to the park by their mother, now their mothers are forcing them into basements for protection and they don't understand.

There's no way I can cope, no way I can turn over a new page. I have seen children slaughtered. I don't think I'll ever be OK again.

RAZAN

MOTHER

“ONE OF THEM HAD TAKEN THE BET AND SHOT HIM IN THE HEAD.”

I was walking home in Karak, Dera'a. I came behind two armed men and overheard them taking bets on something. They were planning to use something for target practice. When they then agreed the bets I realised they were talking about an eight-year-old boy who was playing alone on the road. I realised too late – one of them had taken the bet and shot him in the head. Everyone ran and the street was deserted.

The child was lying on the street, I couldn't move. It wasn't a clean shot and he didn't die straight away. It took hours. His mother was inside the house on the same street and she was screaming. She wanted to reach her child, but the men kept firing into the street and taunting this mother: “you can't get to your child, you can't get to your child!”

He died alone on the street outside his home.



AMANI

13 YEARS OLD

“ONCE, WHEN I WAS IN THE SHELTER, I WAS SO SCARED I HAD A FIT. MY SISTER TOLD ME IT WAS A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.”

To start with the violence wasn't so extreme. We could cope. But now they've started to kill children.

When they started shelling our village we spent ten days in a row in our basement.

I've heard a lot about torture and slaughter. Thank God I've not witnessed it myself. But I have seen what happens after torture. I saw it with my brother, Hamam. Seven months ago they broke into our uncle's house and started beating my brother with sticks. Then they took turns jumping on his back. He was beaten so badly that he still can't walk.

There are no hospitals to take him to – they refuse to treat people. So my uncle brought him to our house. What else could he do? I remember seeing my brother the first time after he was beaten. He was so pale and he couldn't walk. I thought he was about to die.

We put him in bed. He's still there. We had to leave him there when we came here.

When we fled we didn't have time to pack properly, so I have none of my things with me. I don't even have anything to remind me of my brother.

One of my friends here witnessed her mother dying in front of her. Since then she's lost her mind.

Once, when I was in the shelter, I was so scared I had a fit. My sister told me it was a nervous breakdown.

I don't want to eat anymore. I'm not hungry. I've lost so much weight over the past few months.

When I think about what happened, I can't stop myself crying. I cry all the time.

I don't know how long it will take us to recover – perhaps a lifetime.

FARAH

17 YEARS OLD

“IN MY SLEEP, MY FRIENDS TELL ME THAT I SHOUT FOR MY MOTHER AND SOMETIMES SCREAM ‘LEAVE ME ALONE! LEAVE ME ALONE!’”

In jail I was handcuffed, taken outside and tied to a wooden post with my arms above my head.

I was savagely beaten for two days. I remember being beaten with the butt of a rifle, with a horse-whip and with sticks. I don't know what else they used. They beat me on my back and my front.

After the first few hours, I couldn't feel a thing. Then I fainted. I must have been left hanging there because when I woke up I was still there.

I didn't think I would leave there alive. On the third day I was moved somewhere. They thought I would commit suicide, because so many people have.

My grandmother and my mother came to beg for my release. They carried me home. I didn't move from my bed for a month. My back still hurts.

Now, in my sleep, my friends tell me that I shout for my mother and sometimes scream “Leave me alone! Leave me alone!”



Syrian refugees carry their belongings to their tent after arriving at Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan.

ALA'A

10 YEARS OLD

“THEY PULLED OUT OUR FOOD, THREW IT ON THE FLOOR AND STAMPED ON IT, SO IT WOULD BE TOO DIRTY TO EAT.”

When the shells started to fall I ran. I ran so fast. I ran and I cried at the same time.

When we were being bombed we had nothing. No food, no water, no toys – nothing. There was no way to buy food – the markets and shops were bombed out.

After that we came back home. To make our food last we just ate once a day.

My father went without food for days because there wasn't enough. I remember watching him tie his stomach with rope so he wouldn't feel so hungry.

One day men with guns broke into our house. They pulled out our food, threw it on the floor and stamped on it, so it would be too dirty to eat. Then we had nothing at all. Soon after that we came here.

NABIL

ALA'A'S FATHER

“I WAS CLOSE TO LOSING MY MIND. I HAVE NEVER FELT SO HELPLESS AS THE MOMENT I SAW THOSE CHILDREN STRAPPED TO THOSE TANKS.”

My children have been devastated by this conflict. My son Ala'a cries a lot without telling us why and he's started sleepwalking. My other child has started to stutter.

The younger children still cry when a plane goes overhead or a pot falls to the ground. They're traumatised. I've spoken to lots of parents and they say the same thing.

No child has escaped this. Children aren't children anymore. Watch any child. They play and look normal, but they can only keep this up for a while, and then they become sad again.

In Syria I buried two children with my own hands – Maher, who was 11, and Wasem, who was three. They were both executed with knives to punish their parents.

I carried Wasem's body after it was dumped in the village. He had his neck cut through from the back, and a bullet in his elbow. I remember thinking as I picked up his body that his arm was not attached properly. But then I realised, of course, it did not matter; he was already dead.

Wasem was a lovely child – so talkative. Everyone in the village loved to see him play and smile. Now he's dead.

Children are on the frontline in this war in many ways. I have seen with my own eyes children used as human shields. When two tanks came into the village I saw children attached to them, tied up by their hands and feet, and by their torsos. The tanks came through the village and no one stood in their way or fought because we knew we would kill the children.

After that happened I cried like a woman. I was close to losing my mind. I have never felt so helpless as the moment I saw those children strapped to those tanks.

The name of the village was Saydeh. Let everyone know this is where this terrible thing happened.

MOHAMAD

15 YEARS OLD

“THEY USED DIFFERENT WAYS TO KILL PEOPLE – ELECTRIC SHOCKS, THROWING MACHINERY AND CEMENT BLOCKS ON PEOPLE’S HEADS...”

When we were inside Syria there was shooting, shelling and fire. They rained shells down on us and the nearby villages.

I felt there was no mercy. They're killing people with air strikes. When the air strikes took place we would run into the shelter or the basement. Sometimes armed men would break into the house.

During Ramadan, the shooting and shelling were constant. Each and every day.

A massacre took place in my village. Around 25 people were killed – I witnessed it with my own eyes. They used different ways to kill people – electric shocks, throwing machinery and cement blocks on people's heads, arresting people and making them suffer in prison.

I feel they have neither religion nor understanding.

During the day here in the camp I look after my younger siblings. I take them to the playground.

The thing we struggle with is this dust. People constantly get sick here – one of my brothers got sick today.

I ask Arabs around the world to solve this and to help us. Sometimes I feel we might also die from the situation here.



Mohamad, 15, is living with his brothers and his father and mother in one tent in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan.



Mohammad, 17, is living on his own in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. He has suffered extreme burns to his face and body as a result of the shelling in Syria. Mohammad has been assigned a Save the Children social worker to help him deal with his experiences, and to ensure that he can access help in the camp – from shelter to food and water.

MOHAMMAD

17 YEARS OLD

“THEY RIPPED THE FINGERNAILS FROM SIX-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN.”

There have been a huge number of children being killed in Syria. In my village there was a two-year-old girl who was shot, and died. She was walking, doing nothing but walking, and they killed her. I saw her body with my own eyes, her uncle was carrying her. The bullet was next to her heart, she died immediately. They had no chance to try and save her. A two-year-old girl!

In my village there was a demonstration a while ago. Some children were in the demonstration, but not many. As a punishment, armed men went to the school. They selected 50 children at random in the classrooms, from grades 1 to 7. They took them out of the school and tore out their fingernails. Many of these children were six years old, just six. They ripped the fingernails from six-year-old children. They kept the children. People in the village were trying everything to get their children back, but we had no weapons, so could do nothing. I don't know where they are now, I left soon after that happened.

People in Syria are dying. They're getting arrested. Their houses are being broken into. It's not safe any more – there's so much shelling. In my village there are a lot of houses being destroyed by air strikes, shells, tanks. Houses are destroyed, or someone in the family is killed or imprisoned. Not one house is left untouched.

Each and every family in Syria is terrified. They are guaranteed nothing – one day their house may be destroyed; another day a family member may be killed. There's no way to know when this will happen.

We were walking down the street, and there was shooting. We all got injured. My mother was hit by a bullet and so were my two sisters, in their legs. There was no reason for it. They survived, but my uncle died.

The armed men on the street say, “OK, shall we kill this guy? How about this woman – who wants to kill her?” They want the streets for themselves.

Whenever a house was destroyed I'd go with my family to try and help. One house I saw was a three-floor house, the shelter was in the basement. The shells destroyed the whole thing, including the basement. 13 people died that night; four of them were children. I ran there to help. We found the bodies, covered in dust. We buried them as best we could. Shelters don't work, nothing does. They're using all sorts of things – bombs, shells, guns, tanks.

Children take part in drawing activities in one of Save The Children's Child Friendly Spaces in Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan.



In another village nearby they were going from house to house. I heard they found a shelter housing 50 children. They killed them all. They shot some in the head, others were killed with knives. There is nothing they didn't use to kill these children. I don't understand how they could do this, how anyone can do this.

I will try any way I can to let the whole world know that this is actually happening in Syria. This is real, it's happening. I want the whole world to know, I want the whole world to listen.

I never know if my family in Syria will be alive from one moment to the next. I could call them now and then five minutes later they could be dead. Children are crying all the time, terrified because of the bombings.

Save the Children is helping me here. I have a Save the Children social worker who is helping me find somewhere to live, and making sure I have food and water.

**“EACH AND EVERY FAMILY IN SYRIA
IS TERRIFIED.”**

MOHAMMAD, 17



Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan

MOUSSA

15 YEARS OLD

**“I WAS BEATEN UP EVERY DAY,
AND THEY USED ELECTRICITY TOO.”**

I was captured by the police and put in prison for 22 days. I was tortured and I saw children dying. I've got scars on my feet, chest and back. There were hundreds of us in prison – I was in a big cell with the other children. The youngest ones were nine or ten, they had been captured. I was beaten up every day, and they used electricity too.

In prison, when someone died, they kept hitting the body. There were dead bodies in my cell too – they'd been there for a long time and they stank. They were decomposing – there were maggots. Eventually, they threw me out. They carried me out on a blanket. I couldn't move. A passerby stopped and looked at my ID. He took me to my village, where my family found me and took me to hospital. I still have back pains.

I came here with my twin brother. He's now in hospital being cared for by our older brother. He got second-degree burns after our house was attacked. There were tanks and shelling. One of my brothers was killed – shot in the head. At that time, I was in prison. That was five months ago. They ransacked houses and shops, killed small children. They even targeted schools, hospitals and mosques.

I've lost my father, but my mother is here in Jordan – in hospital in Zarqa.

She ran away from the camp because she had health issues. She has heart problems and the dust in the camp was making it difficult for her to breathe. I wish I could see her. I haven't spoken to her for 20 days.

I want people to know what's happening in Syria.

I have one friend in the camp. I come to the child-friendly spaces every now and then, but I don't play. I used to be more sociable, but now I'm not doing anything at all. I'm depressed. I don't want to socialise. I don't feel secure in my sleep.



Photo: Hedinn Halldorsson/Save the Children

OMAR

11 YEARS OLD

“I WAS SO SCARED, MY TONGUE WAS FROZEN. I COULDN'T EVEN TALK.”

We left Syria because there is so much shelling, so much war. It is too much. I was so scared.

Once I was asleep and I woke up because I heard the shells fall next to our house. I was so scared my tongue was frozen. I couldn't even talk.

One day I was playing with my brothers and my cousin. We were teasing her and she was upset. She left us and went to her house. That night, a shell destroyed my nine-year-old cousin's house – the one we'd upset during the day. I regret that she died feeling sad.

We were worried that shells would destroy our house, but my mother and sister refused to leave. We started sleeping outside of the village at night. The time I was most frightened was when shells fell close to my home. I was mostly worried about my parents. When they fall they are so loud, it can cause people to go deaf.

Our house is huge and I think it's still standing, although it has been shelled. We had no front door when we left, thanks to shell fragments. We had a truck, but it doesn't exist any more – it was burnt. It was in the middle of some fighting and was used as a shield.



Omar is 11 years old and lives in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. He shares a tent with his parents and brothers.

MOHAMAD

24 YEARS OLD

“WE CALL THIS THE FORGOTTEN MASSACRE. THERE WAS NO MEDIA, NO OUTRAGE.”

Children in Syria are living in the worst circumstances in the world. Children used to play with balls, now they play with fragments of shells, guns, bullets.

At the beginning of the conflict it was different – specific people were targeted then. To start with it was only shells. Now there are tanks, rockets, snipers. Now it is indiscriminate killing.

The massacre that took place in my town killed almost 200 children. We call this the forgotten massacre, because no one knows about it. There was no media, no outrage.

We went towards the armed men to say that we were ‘one hand’ together. They started to shoot. We ran, but one man was killed.

Many people came to the funeral, as a sort of peaceful protest. Perhaps 1,000 people, and about half were children. We left the funeral and saw a large group of people in the town, and heard shouting. We ran over. They had dropped a bomb, a powerful one. I didn’t know it yet, but 220 people had died – probably more – but that’s the number of bodies we recovered. Around 450 people were severely injured too.

There were bodies everywhere. Not even complete bodies – skin, legs, blood. Everywhere. I started to help pull out the bodies, the injured, to help them, to identify them. I saw a hand and pulled it to get the body out, but it was only a hand. Then I pulled on a leg – it was only a leg.

People were all around, searching for their children’s bodies, their loved ones. We carried the bodies and the injured to a mosque. Then the mosque was bombed. All those injured people there died. I think there were about 30 people, but I don’t know for sure, no one does.

After that I carried the injured to a hospital, begging for help. But we were turned away again and again. So yet more people died.

I thought that surely, after this, there would be no more shelling. I was wrong – there were more shells, more rockets, and then some shooting. At the beginning of the massacre there were no snipers, but then they came in. It was then that we realised we couldn’t bury everyone separately, it was too dangerous. So we decided on a mass grave for the 220 bodies.



Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan

My cousin and my uncle died in this massacre. My cousin was 16. We found their bodies, and carried them out. We wanted to bury them separately, despite the danger, so we buried them at night.

After the massacre, my town was like a ghost town. My cousin's mother was distraught after his death. She refused to leave the town – the last place she saw him alive. We were – we are – all devastated.

As well as the massacre, people are being jailed without reason. I was imprisoned for three months and 20 days.

The jail I was held in was very small – perhaps 4x4 metres – with 70 people crammed in. These people included children and elderly people.

There was a very small window in the jail for fresh air, and a tiny door for the new prisoners – they were shoved through it. Whenever we wanted to sleep, those who could handle staying awake would stand up and those who needed sleep would lie down. When I slept I tried to sleep near the door, because the smell was so bad.

It was men and boys only, the women were held separately. The women had children with them. Some of them gave birth while in the prison.

Children were arrested in my village. They were tortured. Many of them could no longer stand after the torture, the pain was so bad. These children were guilty of nothing. They didn't have weapons. I've never heard of an 11-year-old being arrested and tortured before. What was their crime? Where else in the world does this happen? These children were 11, 12, 13.

They used different weapons to torture these children. They used the same methods as with adults. If any child joined any kind of demonstration he or she was arrested and tortured.

I was tortured, but my only injuries now are emotional. I was tortured several months ago and my wounds have healed since. Except my tongue – you can see here. They crushed my head and I had my tongue forced between my teeth.

I was tortured with electricity. The children were too – I saw this. We were in the same jail. The guards didn't hesitate – they used electricity on their hands, their legs, their backs, their genitals. They would beat the children until they bled. Many died.

They used to tie children's hands together. They were bound so tightly that the children would beg for them to be loosened. Instead they tightened them and the veins in their wrists would start to bleed. I witnessed so many children dying from this torture. Some of the children were released, and their bodies were covered with injuries. It's painful to remember this. I can never forget how I saw these children.

“THEY USED ELECTRICITY ON THEIR HANDS, THEIR LEGS, THEIR BACKS, THEIR GENITALS.”

Sometimes they would put children in isolation rooms. They were completely alone, in the dark. These children were 12. Why put them there? They were causing no problems. Psychologically this will take these children years to recover from – if they survive.

The only way to get out of jail is to pay. My parents paid for me to be released, and since then I have spoken to everyone I can about the treatment of people and children in that prison. I am so angry.

Children are emotionally destroyed, they will need 30, 40, 50 years to forget. After what the children have witnessed, they're all emotionally damaged. They used to be children. They're not any more.

Early in the conflict there were lots of men who could fight, now they don't have enough. So they started to take children, give them guns and put them on the borders. Others were forced to march ahead of the armed men, to take the bullets meant for them.

I'm also damaged. I used to think Syria was a safe place to live, but obviously it was all fake. It's shocking. I was shocked all day after the massacre. How could this happen to us? Each and every person is shocked.

It's a totally different life now. I used to study at university. In my free time I would watch DVDs, go on Facebook. I liked to go online and look at nature documentaries and websites. Look at me now. I am sat in a tent in a refugee camp and I don't know where my life will go.

Stop killing people, we want to live peacefully. Stop killing us. This is enough.



Nur is nine years old and lives with her family in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan.

NUR

9 YEARS OLD

“THERE WAS NOTHING THAT THEY DID NOT USE TO HURT US WITH.”

I do not play. Why? Because I am not young any more. I go to the bathroom, take a shower and then sleep. That is all.

In Syria I was happy, I used to play football and other games. Then the violence started and they started to make us suffer. There was nothing that they did not use to hurt us with.

Earlier they used tanks, and then they took it further and started using air strikes, bombings, missiles and every weapon you could think of. They killed us. Today there is nothing left in my home village, and most of the people have left.

I was terrified. Us along with my cousins, neighbours, aunts and people we know used to go to the shelter to hide. I used to like hiding. Hiding is better than dying.

The camp is better than being in Syria – there they are shooting at us while here there is neither shooting nor shelling. I want it to stop so we can go back, so I can play again with my friends.

RAED

FATHER

“I FEEL AS IF EVERY DEAD CHILD WAS MY OWN.”

My son was born in a shelter, under bombs. He is now seven months old.

I remember the day he was born. The shelling started at 10pm. We were at home and there was no electricity because it had been bombed out. The bombs didn't stop, so we were forced to run to the shelter. My wife was on the brink of giving birth, and I knew we needed a doctor. We had no medicines. I left the shelter and ran to find a doctor. I found one who was helping injured people. He came back with me and together we helped my wife give birth safely.

My only concern is for my children. They are the sole reason I decided to leave.

The bombardment was haphazard – there were absolutely no certain timings for it to take place. The shelling was unbearable, especially for our children. They were so scared. There was no way to say where the next shell would come from.

We are now familiar with bombardments. When the first shell fell, we would run to the shelter. We didn't wait to see how close it was, we didn't wait until our house was destroyed to run.

There was no water or electricity in the shelter – it was pitch black. The children were exhausted, thirsty and hungry. We tried to take food to the shelter but it ran out so quickly. Sometimes we stayed for three days in the shelter, and then we were forced to leave to get food and water – we risked the bullets and the shells to feed our family.

What am I most worried about? My children. What did they do to deserve this? What crime? The only way to keep them safe was to leave Syria. I have seen with my own eyes children's bodies in my town, dead and covered with sand. I feel as if every dead child was my own. We tried to save whoever we could and the rest we dug out from the rubble with our own hands.

World leaders have watched this now for over a year and a half. It is time for action. I feel as though Syria is fading away because of this inhumanity.



Raed is a father and lives with his family in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. His wife gave birth during bombardment.

MOHAMMAD

17 YEARS OLD

**“THE NIGHTS WERE THE WORST.
YOU COULDN’T SLEEP, YOU COULDN’T
LIE DOWN.”**

They came and arrested all the men and boys over 15 in the village. I was held in prison for three days. They hit me in the face with their batons. On the second night, they interrogated me.

They tied my hands and hung me up. They insulted me, whipped me with belts and poured water over me.

The nights were the worst. The cell was around 4x3 metres and there were lots of us in there. You couldn't sleep at all, you couldn't lie down. I was without food for three days, and there was no water, only water from the toilet.

I saw people dying in prison. Some died of hunger and dehydration. The only reason I got out is because they know my uncle.

Before the conflict started, I was at school. They dropped 12 bombs on my school, because one of the groups involved in the fighting had used the school for meetings.

They forced women to dig up dead bodies and leave them for dogs. The cemetery was also bombed so bodies were lying everywhere.

They also cut people's wrists, knowing there was no medical help to get and that their victims would bleed to death. That's how the husband of the woman in the next tent died.



Photo: Heimir Halldorsson/Save the Children

Mohammad, 17, from Dera'a, lives in Za'atari camp. Mohammad was imprisoned and tortured in Syria. He got out of prison after three days.



“I WORRY THAT THE CHILDREN WILL
NEVER RECOVER FROM WHAT THEY’VE
SEEN. THEIR PAIN MIGHT NEVER STOP.”

ALI

12 YEARS OLD

“YOU CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT I'VE SEEN, AND WHAT SYRIA HAS SEEN.”

We left Syria because of the shelling. Every night I'd wake up scared. I'd rather die here than die in Syria.

They broke into houses. They stole things from our house, and broke the doors, broke our things. They even stole our food while we were in the basement. In my place, you'd commit suicide from what we've seen.

My cousins, a 17-year-old boy and a nine-year-old girl, died because of the shelling. It destroyed their home. My cousin's wife who also died had a newborn baby. Who'll take care of her? She also had another three young children.

Whenever I heard shelling, I was so scared. I remembered my cousins, and I cried. When I looked at where their house used to be, I felt very sad.

The day my cousins died, the shelling carried on continuously.

As I was leaving to head home, two shells were thrown. The first one destroyed my cousin's house and the second one destroyed a mosque in the village. I ran, I was so scared. I just hid in a phone booth. Then I went out on the street and called for my mother. More shells fell and I was scared.

Most were stuck in schools. Many schools were targeted. So much shelling took place there. My second cousin also got injured – he's eight years old. He was in his house which is next to the school, and he was injured. Omar came separately here to this camp, and I was asking everyone where he was. I walked around looking for him, looking in every tent, and then I saw him running towards me. I was so happy.

The things I've seen have made me strong. You can't even imagine what I've seen, and what Syria has seen. When the armed men came for the first time to our house, I was so afraid. But the second time, I was less afraid. I wanted to make everyone around me brave too. My younger brother is actually more brave than I am. When the armed men came to the house, I saw that my brother wasn't afraid. So the next time, I knew I wanted to be as brave as that. And I was.

I miss my neighbourhood the most. And I miss the air. It's different, not like here. I miss the people, my friends. We used to go walking – there's a train station that we would walk to each day, I miss doing that.

I used to play football and go to the park and go on trips with my school. We also invented a game with my friends... I think this is my favourite game. But my friends are not here with me, and we can't play it.

I love school. We used to hang out there under the trees, whenever we didn't want to play sports. My cousin and I were the most popular at our school. Our teachers were great. I'm so sad now that I don't go to school. It makes me want to go back to Syria, so I can get back into school.

My message to world leaders is that children are now homeless and they are losing their parents. Please help us. I am asking those people around the world who can, please help us...

Ali is 12 years old and lives with his family in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. He is currently living with his mother, father and brothers in a tent in the refugee camp.





A boy drags his tent through the wind and dust, Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan.

MUNTHER

10 YEARS OLD

“HE WAS SHOT IN THE HEAD. HE FELL FORWARD IN A PRAYING POSITION.”

I was on the street when the bullets were first fired. We were standing outside a school – we’d just posed for a photo. There were lots of children around.

Then the shooting started. There was chaos. Everyone was screaming. There were bullets and blood everywhere.

A boy called Amjad was standing next to me. He was shot in the head. I didn’t realise at first that he was dead. He fell forward on his knees, in a praying position. He was 15.

Then I felt a terrible pain. I’d been shot too – in my neck. Here, see my scars [Munther has two bullet-sized wounds on his neck, one in the front and to one side of his neck, the other in the back of his neck].

Luckily I was with my friend’s mother. She picked me up and took me straight to a clinic to get help. I recovered from the shooting.

We held a funeral for Amjad. Lots of people came. We made a statue of Amjad and put his own school uniform on it. Then we carried the statue through the streets. I was so sad that day.

My biggest problem now is that I’ve been out of school for a whole year – and I don’t know when I’ll be able to go back to school. I want to become a doctor, but I know can’t do that without a good education.

I just don’t know what’ll happen to us.

“WORLD LEADERS HAVE WATCHED
THIS NOW FOR OVER A YEAR AND
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RAED, FATHER



Save the Children