

## Syria's Next Generation Fights for Safety

"It began about four years ago," Rita Ahmed, a Syrian native and student at BYU-Idaho said. "It began in Damascus and Daraa, and then it started moving towards our small town."

Ahmed said her family was sitting in their home in Latakia, Syria, when they heard the news. Something was happening in Syria; perhaps something more serious than the media was letting on.

The four-and-a-half-year civil war in Syria is responsible for the killing of over two-hundred thousand Syrians, and has caused more than four million of the country's citizens to flee and seek refuge in the Middle East, Europe and the US, according to the New York Times.

"The Syrian media was saying that nothing was happening, but everyone knew that there was something happening. International media was saying that a revolution had started in Syria" Ahmed said.

While Ahmed said frequent killings, bombings, and kidnappings have all earned their slot in daily life, she is more consumed with the safety of her family.

"Latakia was the safest place in Syria and now nowhere is safe" Ahmed said. "Years ago, when my mother told us she was pregnant, I was devastated. I thought, 'What were you guys thinking?' Ahmed stops a tear from trickling down her cheek with her middle finger. "Children are seeing their parents killing each other. Can you imagine when those children grow up? They aren't going to say we should change the country for better. They cannot forget or unsee the things they are hearing and seeing right now. It's everywhere. Parents can't not let their children be exposed to that."

Ahmed's family is one of millions who have sought safety outside of Syria's walls of war.

"I think once I know that my family is finally safe, I can stop feeling so emotional when I talk about the war," Ahmed said.

President Bud Fackrell, branch president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Ankara, Turkey, said Turkey is experiencing one of the greatest influxes of refugee traffic.

“There are over 2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey” Fackrell said. “Turkey has opened their doors to people who have seen their lives torn apart because of the civil war going on in Syria. There is a lot of attention being paid in the media about countries taking in refugees but Turkey has stood at the top of the list in helping. Other countries in the EU are talking about taking in a few thousand while Turkey has taken in millions.”

Ahmed said before the Middle East and Europe were brimming with refugees, the start of a revolution and the beginning of a civil war were initiated with peaceful protests in 2011.

“After two days of civil protests against the Bashar, the militants associated with the Bashar tried to put an end to the protests,” Ahmed said. “The anti-Bashar were fighting back, but then his army started shooting.”

Ahmed said the corruption that evolved from both the challenge to dictatorship and the rise of ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a Salafi jihadist extremist militant group, gradually expanded to the rest of Syria.

“You can’t have an answer to exactly why this is happening; it’s a huge mess and everything is so complicated,” Ahmed said. “It’s not even two groups; there are even some groups that derive from ISIS and some from the army and some just make their own groups. There are some people that say they are from the army and they kill people for money and get away with it. That’s how the situation became tense. Individuals became corrupt.”

Ahmed said after missing school for two days, her family decided that education was a necessity while some families waited as long as one year to send their children back to school.

“Our school was so close to where the tension was, but we still went” Ahmed said. “Everybody got used to the situation, and thought ‘we can’t live like this’, even if we hear guns and bombs we kept our lives going. Just before I left Syria, it was kind of calm; there were just kidnappings. Then there were the bombings.”

Approximately 18,866 Syrian civilians have been killed in Syrian government air attacks, focusing blasts on mosques, schools, and shopping markets while an estimated 181 Syrian civilians have died because of American air strikes according to the New York Times.

Ahmed said as she reflects on the future of her country, she feels it will take almost a decade to make Syria livable again for people like herself and her family.

“I think that now more than ever there is a chance to exercise freedom of speech in Syria, because nobody has time to listen to you,” Ahmed said. “All of the civilized people have either left or just shut up because they know they can’t change the world.”