



The **GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AND PRAYER FOR SYRIA** will be held on September 21. In preparation we have asked guest experts to contribute essays that help our understanding of “the things that make for peace.” We hope these will help in our understanding of an alternative vision of peace with justice and practical peace-making strategies that can stand as alternatives to the war and violence that is being perpetuated in Syria. This is the fourth in this series of background essays.

Syria Global Day of Action and Prayer: September 21st, 2016

SYRIA'S ACUTE AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

By Susan Smith, Community Liaison for the Muslim Peace Fellowship and Community of Living Traditions

The Syrian refugee crisis, along with the global refugee crisis, has reached epic proportions since the start of the Syrian civil war in March 2011. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) estimates there are 65 million forcibly displaced people in the world, 21 million of whom are refugees. Of these, 4.8 million are Syrian and another 8.7 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Syria.



According to Dr. Ani Kalayjian of the [Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention \(ATOP\) Meaningfulworld](#), all Syrians are suffering from acute trauma as a result of the ongoing war. However, many are also suffering from intergenerational trauma. These include the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of Armenians who fled Ottoman Turkish Genocide in 1915; and Palestinian refugees who fled Israeli occupation in 1948 and 1967, as well as fled civil wars in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. It also includes Syrians displaced by the Israeli occupation of the Golan in 1967, and its eventual annexation in 1981.

Without reconciliation of past atrocities and proper healing, Kalayjian says that trauma is often transmitted seven generations and can manifest in the victims as fear, hate and perpetuation of violence.

Some of the most devastating images of acute and intergenerational trauma depict Yarmouk Refugee Camp, once a population of 180,000 Palestinian refugees now reduced to 8,000 living among the rubble. Just outside of Damascus, Yarmouk became the scene of intense fighting in 2012 between the Free Syrian Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine supported by Syrian Army government forces. The camp was besieged by various factions and deprived of supplies, resulting in starvation, disease and untreated medical conditions. Blanketed by barrel bombs by the Syrian Air Force, it was then over-run by the so-called Islamic State, or *Daesh*, in 2015, effectively placing the refugee settlement in a stranglehold. Male residents who did not manage to flee or pledge their oath of allegiance to *Daesh* were executed. In one of the most horrendous examples of acute trauma, those who joined were forced to torture and murder others to prove their fealty. At the same time, in macabre irony and demonstration of intergenerational trauma and violence, *Daesh* militants reminded their captives and recruits that Israel and the United States in particular were responsible for their miserable plight as refugees.

As of August 2016, the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#) puts the Syrian death toll at 470,000, with no end in sight, as foreign powers including the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Qatar protract and fuel a war that should have ended long ago. As the death toll, devastation and destruction continue to mount and grow, humanity looks on with a responsibility to end this horrific war.

Trauma-Healing in Syria

One area in which trauma healing is addressed is through education. Jesuit Refugee Service emphasizes that education is a life-saving intervention for children and adolescents who are forcibly displaced from their homes. In crises like Syria where many agencies provide basic humanitarian assistance, JRS is on the ground organizing educational and recreational activities to heal trauma, promote human dignity, and build skills. "JRS education programs help ensure that the most vulnerable and disenfranchised — with a special focus on women

and girls — have access to an education," said Armando Borja, Regional Director of Jesuit Refugee Service North America.¹

While the brutal living conditions of displacement severely affect all Syrians, children bear the most trauma of war: lost homes, lost security, lost communities, lost educations. These factors threaten to culminate in lost futures of an entire generation. The Karam Foundation has a Creative Therapy program for displaced Syrian children, which counters these traumatic factors by rebuilding bonds between mentor and child, rekindling inspiration and creativity, restoring confidence, and reclaiming the innocence of childhood.²

Mennonite Central Committee provides essential trauma healing to help defuse violent responses to conflict. MCC's partners, like the Popular Aid for Relief and Development (PARAD) in Lebanon, offer trauma care that helps children and their parents build their resiliency and think through decisions in this stressful situation. Naomi Enns, an MCC representative for Lebanon and Syria, describes the work PARAD is doing as "holding very, very fragile communities in the south together in 'peace'ful cohabitation."³

Ways You Can Help

1. Stand in solidarity with Syrian victims of acute and intergenerational trauma, who are being targeted in many hateful ways. Join the [Global Day of Action and Prayer for Syria](#) on September 21 at the Community Church of NY at 40 East 35th Street in NYC.
2. Use your voice to tell your elected officials to immediately stop all bombing and other military actions that perpetuate the terrible war in Syria. We support a just peace approach scaling up delivery of food and medicine, trauma healing, restorative justice, unarmed civilian protection, and transformative dialogue with all stakeholders to build a sustainable just peace;
3. Tell your elected officials that you support a more humane world and welcome the resettlement of refugees in your community;

¹ "Education is a life-saving intervention for refugees," 19 May 2016, Jesuit Refugee Services Newsroom (website), https://en.jrs.net/news_detail?TN=NEWS-20160519024125

² <http://www.karamfoundation.org/education/>

³ "MCC's help gives Syrians a reason to stay," September 11, 2015, Mennonite Central Committee (website)

4. Apply your skills and resources to address the refugee crisis locally, helping with resettlement wherever you live. If you're in the Lower Hudson Valley, for example, contact the Westchester Refugee Task Force (westchesterrefugeetaskforce@gmail.com) to see how you can assist in the resettlement of 101 refugees in the county in the coming year;
5. Donate to humanitarian relief organizations like the ones below, which are working on the ground in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Greece and elsewhere to provide urgent food and medical care, or to sponsor a Syrian orphan;
6. Earn a certificate in humanitarian outreach and trauma prevention from the Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) [Meaningfulworld](#). Learn about the legacy of trauma in your own life, how to heal from it and help heal others, and participate in a humanitarian mission abroad.

Consider funding some of these organizations:

- [Islamic Relief USA](#) Islamic Relief USA provides relief and development in a dignified manner regardless of gender, race, or religion, and works to empower individuals in their communities and give them a voice in the world.
- [Jesuit Refugee Service North America](#) In Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern countries, as well as within Syria itself, JRS is helping Syrians who fled their homes. JRS offers food, rent support, education and psychosocial programs to those most in need, regardless of ethnic or religious background.
- [Karam Foundation](#) The Karam Foundation develops Innovative Education programs for Syrian refugee youth, distributes Smart Aid to Syrian families, and funds Sustainable Development projects initiated by Syrians for Syrians.
- [Mennonite Central Committee](#) Mennonite Central Committee, a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.

***To [DONATE](#) to any of these organizations <click here> and follow the instructions.**

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How Can You Take Part in the GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AND PRAYER FOR SYRIA?

- Join the **GDAPS [Interfaith Prayer Service](#)** Wednesday, September 21st 2016, from 5-6:30 pm at the Community Church of NY at 40 East 35th Street in NYC. Use this [flyer](#) to promote the event and join us!
- Use the available [Toolkit of Resources](#) to plan a prayer service or other activity in your community in conjunction with the day.
- Your congregation, organization or community can endorse the interfaith [Call for an End to the War in Syria](#), which will be issued at a press conference prior to the service. To endorse, contact GlobalDayforSyria@gmail.com.
- Like and follow GDAPS us on social media at [Facebook.com/GlobalDayForSyria](https://www.facebook.com/GlobalDayForSyria) or using **#GlobalDayForSyria**.

Current co-sponsors:

Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld | Buddhist Council of New York | The Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice | Colomban Center for Advocacy and Outreach | Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center | Conference of Major Superiors of Men | Disciples Peace Fellowship | Fellowship of Reconciliation | Franciscan Action Network | Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ | Interfaith Center of New York | JPIC Committee, Passionists of North America | Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives | Leadership Conference of Women Religious | Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns | Mennonite Central Committee U.S. | Muslim Peace Fellowship | Pax Christi International | Pax Christi Long Island | Pax Christi USA | Pax Christi Long Island | Presbyterian Church (USA) | Presbyterian Peace Fellowship | Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) | United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries | United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society