



## PRESS RELEASE



[digital explorer]

London – Damascus #myvoicemyschool exchange.  
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### **BRITISH STUDENTS WITH PEERS IN WAR TORN SYRIA BECOME ADVOCATES ON EDUCATION THROUGH UK-FUNDED CLASS PROJECT CONNECTED VIA SKYPE**

In advance of the 'Supporting Syria and the Region, London 2016' conference on the 4<sup>th</sup> February, **British media outlets are invited** to join in on the unique opportunity to witness the Department for International Development's (DFID) support to education in Syria taking place in the heart of East London.

**On January 25, at 0930 at the Oaklands School in Bethnal Green**, British and Syria students from Damascus will discuss the importance that the role of education plays in their lives via Skype thanks to the #MyVoiceMySchool project.

After five years of conflict, two decades of education progress have been lost as Syria's school enrolment rate has plummeted. One in four schools are not functioning as they have been either destroyed, damaged or they are sheltering displaced people. Some children have never been to school or have lost years of schooling due to internal displacement or safety concerns preventing them from attending classes.

The upcoming London conference will bring leaders from countries around the world, NGOs, the private sector and civil society together, not only to meet the immediate needs of those affected by the Syria crisis, but also to address the necessity of longer-term support – education forming a significant part of this.

The turmoil faced by people in Syria and the region makes education all the more precious for the many refugee students enrolled in 99 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) refugee schools, who have been connected with their peers in Brussels and London. Among those, students in Homs, Damascus and Rif Damascus have taken part.

Over the last three months in London and Damascus students have participated in the #MyVoiceMySchool initiative, which engages them to work together as global advocates for universal quality education. Through live video Skype conversations and customized teaching materials, students and their teachers have been exploring how education can help them meet their future aspirations.

The exchanges bring the students new insights and perspective on their roles as global citizens. As Rima in Damascus says, "We shared our opinions about the surveys we conducted and discussed the problems we face at school and our views on improving education. We learned that that the differences between us are only due to the different living conditions".

In each of the discussions, common themes appear. The need for safety to study, economic opportunity through education, improving the school environment, and dropping out of school are concerns the students discover they share. Reflecting on the experience so far, Raghad in Rif Damascus says, "My Voice My School will help develop

education because it gives us the chance to identify challenges, and share these with the world with the hope the world can help us solve them.”

#MyVoiceMySchool is an exceptional classroom project created and implemented by UNRWA, Digital Explorer and Skype in the classroom. It gives students a voice in their future, as they explore the UN Sustainable Development Goal theme of quality education, alongside universal themes of right of expression and opinions. The project is funded by UKAID and EuropeAid for the Syrian crisis.

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#### **For interested media,**

Limited space will be available to attend the call however interviews with the students or use of the media elements such as films, rushes of the interviews can be answered to upon request.

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#### **Available media:**

All exchanges have been filmed in the UK, Belgium and Syria.

Video includes VOXPOX interviews with students, classroom exchanges and student portraits.

Please screen one minute student story on: <http://www.unrwa.org/myvoicemyschool>

For social media visuals on the exchange, see Facebook photo albums:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.995861277127106.1073741879.105171192862790&type=3>

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#### **Background**

#MyVoiceMySchool is a project created and implemented by UNRWA and UK organization, Digital Explorer and Skype in the classroom. It is designed for students to find their voice and explore UN SDG themes of quality education, and universal themes of right of expression and opinions. The project is funded by UKAID and EuropeAid for the Syrian crisis. For more go to:

[www.unrwa.org/myvoicemyschool.com](http://www.unrwa.org/myvoicemyschool.com) and [www.myvoice.digitalexplorer.com](http://www.myvoice.digitalexplorer.com)

#### **Digital Explorer**

[Digital Explorer](#) is an award-winning education social enterprise based in London. A pioneer in the development of innovative real-world learning programmes, Digital Explorer supports teachers and pupils in schools internationally to engage with and take action on critical global issues from cultural conflict to climate change.

#### **UKAid**

The UK has set the pace in the response to the Syria crisis, pledging over £1.1 billion to Syria and the region. In 2015 alone, DFID has provided GBP 33 million to the Agency's General Fund, GBP 28 million to the Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal, and GBP 2 million to the Agency's oPt Emergency Appeal. The UK will co-host a conference, "Supporting Syria and the Region, London 2016" on 4<sup>th</sup> February, which will seek to address the humanitarian atrocities faced by the people of Syria.

#### **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org))**

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

In Syria, it has responded to the needs of Palestine refugees who have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, due to their proximity to conflict areas inside Syria, high rates of poverty and the tenuous legal status of those forced to flee to Lebanon and Jordan. An estimated 450,000 of the 560,000 refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria remain inside the country; over two thirds (280,000 people) are internally displaced and an estimated 95 per cent (430,000) are in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. This includes tens of thousands of Palestinians who are trapped in areas of active conflict, such as Yarmouk or Khan Eshieh in Damascus or Muzeirib and Jillin in Dera'a, with extremely constrained access to humanitarian assistance. In 2016,

UNRWA needs US\$ 414 million to meet the minimum humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees affected by the conflict in the region. Find out more on **The Syria Crisis**: [www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis](http://www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis)