

PRESS RELEASE

Students from Syria ask for love and support



Students review their press releases before reading them with the students in London as part of the final step of #MyVoiceMySchool. 25 January 2016, Damascus, Syria. © 2016 UNRWA Photo by Taghrid Mohammed

As world leaders gather in London on Thursday 4 February, My Voice My School represents important young voices from within Syria. Through a series of Skype exchanges and community surveys, the My Voice My School project is the only youth advocacy project working with schools inside Syria.

The exchanges have featured heartache, shared connections, insights and solidarity.

“What do students need in Syria?” asked teenagers at London’s Oaklands School. “We need love,” replied Alaa Al Nabulsi, a 13 year old student at Palestine School Damascus, who also commented, “I would like to become a journalist to deliver the truth to people.”

“My Voice My School helped me become a courageous person and I overcame my fears and met new people from another place. I liked this project because it gave me a chance to deliver my voice to people,” adds her fellow student, Jihan.

Student groups worked to produce press releases featuring some of the ideas that need funding by the international community to provide young people with a quality education, ensuring we do not face a lost generation in Syria.

A student group at Palestine School in Damascus highlighted poverty alleviation and cash handouts as one of the ways to keep students in school and decrease the dropout rate. “We noticed that the first problem causing dropout of school was poverty. 90% of the [school survey] participants said that poverty is the main problem and we suggested to find a way to support the poor students with money.”

Another consequence of the conflict that is having an impact on education levels is “that many teachers who are highly qualified and has [sic] practical experience have travelled out of the country. We talked about the topic which described the teachers and the skills they must have. We explained

the problems the [sic] occurred at schools during the crisis in Syria. We talked about the newly appointed teachers who lack teaching experience.”

But it was not just the students in Syria who identified ways to improve education provision. Hafsa, at Oaklands School in London, was inspired by the level of psycho-social support received by students in Damascus. Oaklands students no longer have access to a school counselling service and Hafsa and her group want to change this, “We had three sessions of Skype calls to the children in Damascus, Syria where they informed us of their problems and how they overcome them. This stimulated us to try and develop our school too, hence why we have introduced the idea of having an onsite school counsellor.”

In partnership with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Skype and with funding from UKAID and Europeaid, Digital Explorer developed My Voice-My School to support classes in Damascus, Qabr Essit and Homs together with partner schools in London and Brussels, with the aim of providing a platform for youth advocates for education.

Ends

Available media:

Video

Please see student voice videos at: <http://bit.ly/mvms-films>. Uncompressed .mov versions of these films can be supplied on request.

Photos

Please see <http://digitalexplorer.zenfolio.com/p210452049> for photos of the project. Captions and credit details are included for each video.

Student materials

Unedited versions of student work in Word and PowerPoint format are also available.

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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 and 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 4th 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)

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