

# **The War in Syria - “To Search for True Man”**

## **A Peula for chanichot 14+ years old**

### **Aims:**

- Raising awareness to the war in Syria and the injustice there.
- Breaking the silence and apathy in our and our chanichim's hearts about what is going on in Syria.
- Developing empathy and compassion towards those who suffer from the war, especially kids and youth.
- Developing a Zionist stance that strives for a just, moral and peaceful life for the Jewish people in their sovereign country out of a wide perspective of responsibility – for the Jewish people, for Israeli society and for Israel's neighbors in the Middle East. Creating affiliation and connection for Habonim Dror chanichim with forces who strive for this within Israeli society.

### Appendices:

Mara's blog, Chana Senesh poem

### L'Madricha:

It's been 5 years and 40 weeks since the war in Syria broke in spring 2011. The war took the lives of about 450,000 people, including 16000 kids who were murdered. 12.5 million people were forced to leave their home, including 5 million children. Half of the have left Syria and half live without houses within the country.

Millions boys and girls live in hunger and in the cold, under constant threat over their bodies and souls, but their voice is not heard.

In this sicha we will choose to teach and explain what is happening in Syria on a very basic level. There is no expectation of you as a madricha to explain all the political complexities of the forces taking action in Syria. The goal of the learning (Lemidah, in Hebrew) is to lay a foundation for our chanichim's investment and critical analysis of the situation, and to help our chanichim better understand the atmosphere in which the youth and children we talk about in the peula live. We believe that chanichim can take this peula forward and act to help the Syrians, basing their act in the equality of human value (Shivion Erech Ha'adam)

1) **Tell the chanichim:** it's already 6 years since the war in Syria began. This war is happening right on the Israeli northern border, and every day dozens of people are getting killed. We will dedicate this peula to this subject and what is going on in Syria nowadays.

- What did you hear about the war?
- What do you know?
- How often do you hear news from Syria?

2) **Go over appendix A- some data about the current situation in syria.**

- Did you know these numbers?
- Are they surprising?
- Is there a gap between what you know now and what you expected to be the situation?
- Is it important to be aware of this information?

3) **Growing up in the war in Syria**

- What do you think is on children and youth's minds in Syria in the past few years?
- How do you think the war is affecting them?

Read parts from Marah's blog (Appendix B). You can do it in pairs, when each pair is given a different part.

Say: Marah is a girl that up until not long ago lived in Syria and wrote an internet blog. Marah is not her real name but her pen-name that she made up for the sake of her and her family's safety. Marah's father was killed in 2014 and she traveled with her mother and young siblings inside Syria, after her city was attacked and her house destroyed. Her blog was published in the youth journal "Rookie".

Discussion:

- What do you think about the things Marah writes? What feelings/thoughts it brings up?
- Why does her mother tell her to stop dreaming? Why is it important for her to dream on?
- How do you think the war affects Marah and the people surrounding her?
- If you met Marah, what would you tell her?

4) **Tell the chanichim about Hannah Senesh.** Like Marah, Hannah Senesh was also a teenager in a war, and we can learn about her time period through her diary entries and poems. She was a madricha in the Noar HaOved in ken Kiryat Chayim, During World War 2 she enlisted to go to Europe and fight the Nazis, who captured and executed her. We'll read a poem she wrote when she was 19. We're not trying to compare between Hannah Senesh and Marah, or the situations in World War 2 and Syria, but we do believe that there is similarity in the human experiences of people whose lives and societies are in danger due to war. We as Jews, who have experienced the Holocaust and screamed then that the world was silent, have a unique moral obligation to do all we can to influence and even change the murderous reality taking place now.

**Read a poem by Hannah Senesh: "In fires of war"( appendix c)**

Discussion:

- What does Hannah ask for inside a reality of war?
- What does it mean "a true man" (or more correctly, person)? What does she wish to find?
- What does it mean to be "true people" in a reality of war?
- Do we, as Jews and as members of Habonim Dror, have a role regarding the war in Syria? Should we have a stance?
- What do you think should be our role? Our Tafkaid?

5) **For the madricha:** The point of the last question is to get the chanichim out of the apathy that the Jewish world and Israeli society feel about the Syrian war. It's an extremely difficult question- of course we want to end the war and stop the tragedy, and we should expect the world to do something, but we ourselves can't end the war right now. We need to ask what we can do to make change, even in a reality where we don't seem to have a chance. It may be that what we can do is not enough in the face of what is needed, but it's better than apathy, standing to the side, and falling into despair and helplessness. As Marah writes in her blog - even in the face of evil, she doesn't want to set boundaries on her dreams.

6) **Operation "human warmth":** Explain that a few years ago, Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed youth movement organized an operation called "Chom Enoshi" (Human Warmth). Explain about the operation and watch the video from the last operation ("operation human warmth" on youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyfZXZesxQg>), OR if you don't have a computer you can read appendix D instead.

- What do you think about the decision to operate this thing 3 years ago?
- What is the meaning of activating this operation again today?
- Do you want to take part?
- Do you think Habonim Dror can and should take part in this? In what way?

Tell the chanichim that the situation in Syria in the past two years only got worse, with more people killed and more displaced from their homes. The winter Israel and Syria are in right now is very dangerous to millions of kids that are in danger of death due to hunger and extreme cold. This operation is crucial for hundreds of people in today's reality.

7) **For sikkum, read the article by Yara Halabi (Appendix E)**, a Rakezet of Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed in the Mas'adde ken. (Appendix E) Explain that Mas'adde is a small druze village in the Golan heights, very close to the Syrian border. Up till 1967 it was under Syrian control.

# Syrian refugee crisis in numbers

One out of five Syrians is now a refugee in a neighbouring country. The UNHCR says more than **four million people** have fled Syria since the conflict began in 2011. **More than half of them are children.**

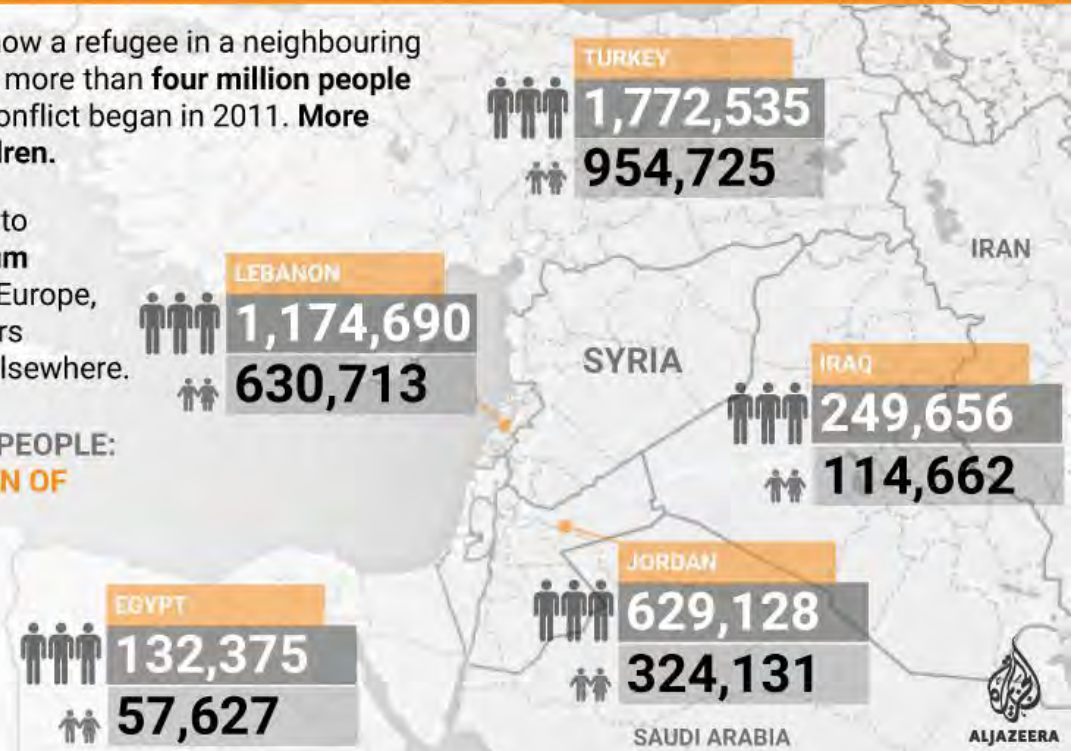
The figure does not take into account the **270,000 asylum applications** by Syrians in Europe, and the thousands of others resettled from the region elsewhere.

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE:**  
7.6 MILLION – 3.5 MILLION OF THEM ARE CHILDREN

= TOTAL REFUGEES  
 = CHILD REFUGEES



Source: Al Jazeera



## IN NUMBERS

Number of Syrian refugees

**4,390,439**

European applications

Between 2011 and 2015

**807,337**

applications were filed

Serbia and Germany received

**57%**

of applications

Sweden, Hungary, Austria, Netherlands and Bulgaria received

**31%**

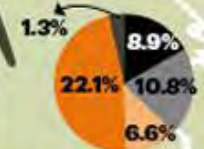
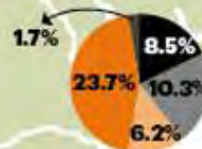
of applications

## DEMOGRAPHICS

● 0-4 ● 5-11 ● 12-17 ● 18-59 ● 60+

Female refugees (50.3%)

Male refugees (49.7%)



SOURCE: UNHCR.ORG

# SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

## Children Caught in War



More than 50% of Syrian refugees are children who've lost everything.



FAMILY



HOME



SCHOOL

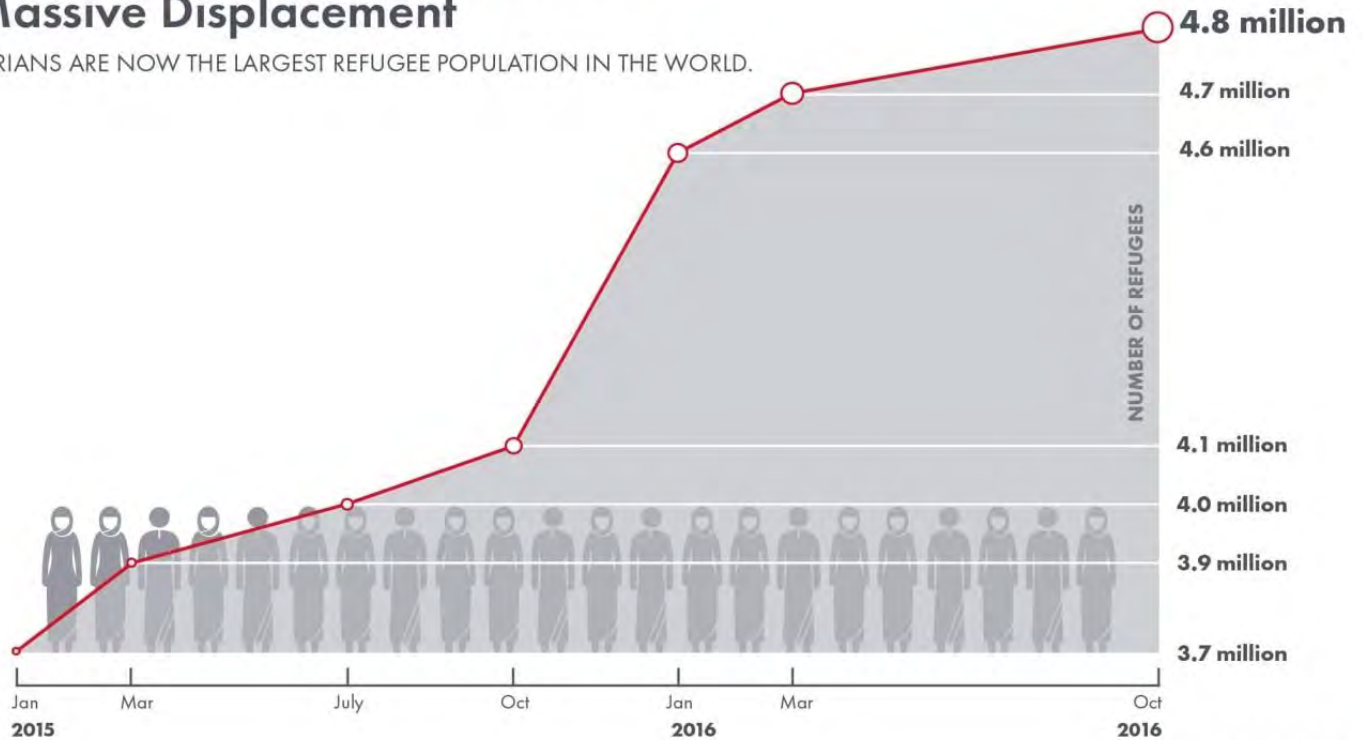


FRIENDS

# SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

## Massive Displacement

SYRIANS ARE NOW THE LARGEST REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE WORLD.



Marah is an 18-year-old living in one of Syria's besieged cities. For her own safety, she writes here under a pen name.

## April 16, 2014

My name isn't really Marah, but that is the name I've chosen to write under here. I can't use my real name, because it might put me in danger. Let me explain.

The city I live in was once magnificent. In spring, it bloomed. We used to wake up to the sound of birds chirping and to the fragrant scent of flowers. Today, spring is here again. But what kind of spring is this? We now wake up to the sound of falling bombs.

Every day, we open our eyes to our bleak reality in Syria: to the mortar shells that bring fear, death, disease, and destruction. For the past three years, civil war has robbed us of our loved ones, destroyed our special places, hurt our close friends. Take, for example, my neighbor's daughter: At just seven years old, she has lost the ability to speak after a rocket landed close to our street.

The change happened in spring 2011. I was 15. Some young Syrians were peacefully protesting the government, asking for more political rights. The government responded with brutal force and attacked its own citizens. Since then, things have gotten worse and worse. More than 140,000 people have been killed in the civil war.

Today, my city's once-friendly face has been replaced by the suffering of its residents. Among the many things I wish I hadn't seen: a young boy who has been exposed to chemical weapons but has no access to medical treatment, an old man who feels powerless after losing his legs to a bomb, a young man who wears black sunglasses to hide his severely scarred face from children who might be frightened by the sight, a young woman who is blind because doctors lacked the proper medical equipment to extract the shrapnel from her eyes.

The bombings have turned my city into a ghost town of decrepit buildings and charred trees. Even our animals weren't spared. You often see a limping dog, a dead cat, a bird mourning its destroyed nest.

During the hardest times, when bombs fell from the sky, we dreamed of bread. We rationed our food intake to one meal a day. You never get used to sleeping on an empty stomach.

I remember vividly the day someone smuggled some cattle feed, or fodder, into our city. We **milled the feed (mainly a combination of grass, hay, and straw) to make dough. It didn't take long to get used to the bad taste and weird texture of our new "bread."** It brought us a semblance of happiness when eaten with the olives, juice, or yogurt we might have on hand.

Our collective will to eat inspired us to get creative with the fodder. We cooked it like it was rice or wheat. We became so accustomed to eating cattle feed that we almost forgot what chicken, meat, and fruit even looked like.

One of the hardest days was when we heard that a car carrying fruit and candy had entered the city. At first, we were beyond thrilled, but our happiness was fleeting. The exorbitant prices for the items on display meant no one could actually afford them.

**That day, I saw a young boy with holes in his shoes squeeze his mother's hand as they passed by the fruit car. He begged her for an apple. Holding back tears, she promised to make him "fodder cake" when they got home. Who would believe that the availability of fruit could be worse than never even seeing it? Is it not a child's right to have an apple, a banana, or a small piece of candy?**

We have been stripped of our rights, starting with food. We try to entertain ourselves to forget our hunger, but we no longer have electricity, which makes it difficult. (It also makes it hard to **get access to the internet, so I won't be able to post here every single week. I'm hoping for every other week. I will do my best.)** I feel like I'm living in the Stone Age. We wash our laundry by hand and burn wood to keep warm. In this new world, everything we know is gone. We miss the things we took for granted, like TVs and laptops.

The children are supposed to stay indoors at night, but we get bored. My mother keeps my little brother busy by making him break firewood. The skin on his small hands has become thick and calloused. He executes his chore angrily, with an air of rebellion. He lives with a prevailing sense of deprivation. His feelings, like mine, have changed without our knowledge or will.

## September 30, 2015

This year, the holiday came just as schools were opening their doors for the new academic year—right when students need school supplies. Because of the war, most Syrians are unemployed and they cannot afford both occasions at the same time.

Many families are under a lot of pressure, and that leads to stress and fighting. For many, a new backpack or a new pair of pants has become a dream.

As people suffer, others exploit the situation. Property owners have shown no mercy and rents have soared to unprecedented heights. The owner of our tiny apartment wants to double the **rent. My mother's income and my income combined can barely cover our needs, and we** cannot afford our rent. For this reason, we are now looking for an even smaller place.

My income, although small, helps a lot, so I cannot leave my job. I will be working in a showroom during Eid al-Adha. I am not happy that I will not be spending time with my family during the holiday, but the showroom job pays well, and we need every penny. However, my family will be stuck at home, because the streets are not safe—explosions and missiles are everywhere and people are too scared to leave their houses.

As for holiday gifts, we received the best present ever: no electricity or water for five days—we felt less than human. What makes things even more difficult is that, being from an opposition-controlled area, many people blame us for what is happening in the country, as if it was our fault. I am really fed up with what some people say. Often I just cannot control myself, and I explode in their faces and defend myself and all displaced people. My mother says that I should control myself, and avoid responding to such accusations, but I do not agree with her—I believe that it is my responsibility to defend myself and those like me. Additionally, the general pressure makes it very hard for me to absorb and contain such accusations. No matter how strong we are, we all have limits, and the past five years have brought me to mine.



## **November 24, 2015**

**I have developed a temper. I hurt people's feelings easily, and I've lost the capacity for** forgiveness and patience that I used to have. I fight with my siblings and explode with anger, even with my mother, who keeps trying to contain me. I am not even nice to my friends anymore, and I keep losing them, one after another. I feel that hatred has possessed me. I hate **everything around me. I've become a mean person, even with** little kids. Can you believe it? **I do not have respect for anything or anybody, and I'm afraid that I will soon lose my self-**respect—that will be the absolute end. I do not enjoy being around people anymore, and I spend most of my time alone. I do so because I am scared that the monster that has grown inside of me over the past few years might come out and hurt those I love. Have I developed this from those I have had contact with, like a kind of disease? Is it bred by the chaos that we are living in? Or is it because of this bloody war? I do not know.

**I am scared. I am really scared. I do not know what's in store for us. I cannot take our current** situation anymore, and I am afraid that the future will be even harsher. I have been silent recently; silence is my new shelter in this reality that I cannot change. Will it be my end as well?

## **December 1, 2015**

Why dream, when we know that our dreams will never come true?

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, this question has been haunting us young Syrians. In the beginning, I took my dreams for granted, and I did not even realize how crucial they were. I lost my ability to dream until a friend of mine made me a simple promise. This promise brought my dreams back to life—I dreamt that I could leave this stagnant and dangerous place that I used to call my home and my motherland.

My dreams took me to a new life without stress and fear. I dreamt that my family would genuinely smile again, and I dreamt that I would continue my studies and that I would have a bright future. I knew I was only dreaming, but I enjoyed these dreams. My mother says that our dreams should not be without limits, so that we are not crushed when we face reality, but I do not want to believe her. I want my dreams to be limitless. I want to create in my dreams the world that I cannot have in real life.

**these days, the ability to dream is itself a dream, but I've realized that dreams are like any living** plant. They need to be nourished and taken care of, or else they die. I abandoned my dreams for a time, and this made me depressed, but my depression worsened after I hid something from my mother for the first time in my life. I did tell her that I got a new job, but I did not tell her that it

was a full-time job and that I could not show up to classes anymore. She thinks that I go to school in the morning and to my work in the afternoon, but really I spend my whole day at work. I cannot tell her, because she would not let me continue with this job, and I know how much we need the extra money. I *had* to lie to her. I had to help her. I could not watch her wearing herself out trying to put food on the table and not help her. But I do feel guilty about lying to my mother.

## **January 4, 2016**

My mother had a troubling experience when she was on her way home from work—a young man in military uniform stopped the bus that she was on. He was yelling and cursing, looking for a **high school girl who was in the back seat. He pulled the girl's arm and began to drag her off the bus**, as she cried and screamed for help. None of the men on the bus said a word—they were **scared of him because he was in military uniform. My mother couldn't stop herself from speaking**, and she asked him if he was related to the girl. He yelled at my mother and pushed her hand off of the girl, so she stared in his face and told him that **he wouldn't get to the girl unless it was over her dead body. My mother's actions and words inspired other people to help, and together they kicked him off the bus while he was yelling and threatening my mother with imprisonment and even death.** My mother accompanied the girl to school, and she learned that the girl had promised to meet with the soldier that day, but when they were on the phone the **night before she got a bad feeling and felt that she couldn't trust him, so she changed her mind.** This is why he was so angry and revealed his inner monster. This is the country that we live in right now. There is no law, and no system to protect individuals.

Yom kippur eve 1940

October 11, 1940

In the fires of war, in the flame, in the flare,  
In the eye-blinding, searing glare  
My little lantern I carry high  
To search, to search for true Man.

In the glare, the light of my lantern burns dim,  
In the fire glow my eyes cannot see;  
How to look, to see, to discover, to know  
When he stands there, facing me?

Set a sign, O Lord, set a sign on his brow  
That in heat, fire and burning I may  
Know the pure, the eternal spark  
Of what I seek: true Man.

Hannah Senesh's first poem in Hebrew.

# Emergency Aid Operation Human Warmth

The civil war which has been raging in Syria over recent years has created a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions of refugees and displaced persons in constant mortal danger due to shortages in basic means of survival. Today, in response to the hard winter, Israeli Flying Aid, the Hanoar Haoved VeHalomed Youth Movement and Dror Israel will begin a nation-wide humanitarian operation to collect life-saving winter supplies. The operation will begin tomorrow morning and end on January 10, and will be called Operation Human Warmth – Israeli youth aiding Syrian youth.

A terrible civil war has been raging for some two years on the other side of the Syrian border. Since the conflict broke out, over 160,000 people have been killed, some half of them civilians, including 40,000 children. Approximately 9 million residents – 40% of the Syrian population, primarily women and children – live today without a roof over their heads. Most of the refugees and displaced persons lack basic and critical supplies in order to survive the cold winter. 27 Syrian children lost their lives due to the recent cold snap in our region.

As a response to this awful situation on the other side of the border, Israeli Flying Aid, the Hanoar Haoved VeHalomed Youth Movement and Dror Israel have decided together to lead a nation-wide humanitarian operation to collect life-saving winter supplies, including coats, blankets and sleeping bags.

Hod Layish, coordinator of Operation Human Warmth from Hanoar Haoved VeHalomed, on the decision to act now: **“This is an emergency situation which we cannot ignore. Our history as a nation and the fact that we are a democratic society obligates us from a moral perspective to act to help all victims, no matter who they are – to be the voice of the voiceless. We must not stand aside when we can help those who need it. A human disaster of enormous proportions is taking place a four hour drive from Tel Aviv or an hour from Lake Kinneret, and it obligates us as Israelis and human beings to act to save lives.”**

**Barkat Klimstein-Levi**, operation coordinator from Israeli Flying Aid, which provides life-saving aid to civilians in disaster and conflict areas: **“I am proud to be a citizen of a country where youth is breaking the silence and going out to raise active assistance for women and children without shelter who are suffering from cold and hunger. Israeli citizens, because of our past and our geographic proximity, despite the complexity, are putting politics aside and not remaining indifferent to the suffering of innocents. To me, these youth are fulfilling the Zionist dream.”**

The project will be led by Israeli youth, to aid non-combatant women and children.

Beginning tomorrow and until January 10, a nation-wide operation will take place to collect winter supplies at the Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed youth movement clubs. Operation organizers call on the public to join this important project and bring winter supplies to one of the 15 movement clubs in which the supplies will be collected initially (list attached). From there, the supplies will be transferred to Israeli Flying Aid storage sites. Those donating supplies are asked to note several guidelines in order to ensure the wellbeing of the refugees and displaced persons who will use the items collected: for example, do not donate items with logos of Israeli brands or Hebrew print. In addition, packaging coordinators will cut off all of the tags of each and every item of clothing.

Members and counselors of Hanoar Haoved VeHalomed will lead the collection, packaging and sorting of the supplies.

We invite any organization or person who wishes to participate in the effort of moving supplies or working with us to call 054-6738897 or to bring supplies to the collection sites listed on the attachment.

**Donations are also accepted via Teleall: 1-900-575-252**

**Operation Human Warmth website: [www.hom-enoshi.org.il](http://www.hom-enoshi.org.il)**

**For further details:**

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## Youth, Listen!

**Our task as the young generation is to not let the war rob us of our humanity. As the world chooses to be silent again and again in the face of the horrors occurring in Syria, Druze educator Yara Halabi calls on the youth to remain faithful to their dreams of a more just world, a world where everyone has a place.**

As the civil war in Syria broke out, difficult pictures of the destruction and violent death that plagued that nation unfolded in front of our eyes. The wars are wreaking tragedy everywhere without differentiating between ethnicities, and price is being paid mostly by innocent civilians.

What guilt does a newborn child bear, a child who wants to live and plays no role in the leaders' and politicians' plots? The child pays the ultimate price, he is the one whose hopes for life and for a better future are dashed. The events taking place in Aleppo, Syria are horrible, and words cannot describe the extent of my horror nor my personal emotional trauma.

And the entire world? Stands to the side without lifting a finger, as though it were watching a play at the theater!

Our task as the young generation is to not let the war rob us of our humanity, to continue to want to dream, to be faithful to our dreams, and to continue to want to live in a world where everyone has a place.

Personally, as a madricha in the Noar HaOved veHaLomed youth movement, I will educate the youth and bring them this message: after the darkness, we will reach the light. We must always strive to overcome all the obstacles on the path to peace and hope.

My heart is with Aleppo and all the victims of this bloody war.

