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Monthly news bulletin issued by the Women Support Unit and specialized in the public affairs of women in northern Syrian

A Pencil

Sara Mustafa is a Damascene graphic designer who graduated in 2008. After graduation she worked two shifts to gain the required experience that helped her achieve her dream and start her own project in 2013. Soon after she was arrested by the Assad regime due to her revolutionary activity, and as a result her office was sealed after it was emptied from everything. Yet, Sara never gave up.

«A Pencil» this was the nickname given to Sara by her prison-mate, Faten, because of the fact that Sara was passionate about small pencils that she used to hide from the jailors' eyes. She would always try to draw this part of Syria where photographers and reporters can never reach. Although all her notebooks and drawings were taken from her by force, she drew much more and shared them in public after she was released.

It was a sever phase of Sara's life. She had to go through and tolerate too much torture. But she also learned how to better shape her personality especially after she had met many other revolutionary women.

After she was released from the Assad's prisons, Sara got married and had children. Then, she and her family were forcibly displaced to northern Syria where she continued working in graphic design. She also made sure of attending special trainings on empowering women politically and legally, and worked hard on learning new foreign languages. She was determined to move forward in the path of developing her work and acquiring more skills, and motherhood served as a motif for her because her children always promoted her to improve herself and stand as a perfect role model for them. Sara believes that the most decent role she can play is being a wife and a mother, and that raising up her children and equipping them with noble principles and values are indicators for her real success. Scientific and professional success is definitely important to her, but of course it is not everything.



Ara.com

What do you think are the challenges that face women who want to continue their university education? This was the question asked on our Facebook page after we met a large number of women who were drop outs.

The majority of the answers we received showed that the bad economic condition was the most important reason behind women leaving their study as they couldn't afford university fees, book, or transportations.

Other answers were concentrated on social traditions and customs which stand against enrolling girls and women in universities. Some communities adopt the custom of allowing girls to study until a certain educational stage.

The rest of answers included other reasons like:



There are a lot of reasons for this phenomenon including social environment, ignorance about the importance of educating girls and women, having children, stress, and duties imposed on women



University fees.



Displacement, having children, and the unavailability of transportation.



«Good evening. I'll give you a personal example. I was one of the top students but I couldn't complete my study because I belong to a big family. My father is a teacher with a limited income and he couldn't afford my university fees. My siblings are lucky because dad promised they would all complete their studies even if he had to work day and night».



// The impact of the Syrian revolution on the Syrian women...

Destiney of the Syrian women during the ongoing revolution...

In most countries of the world, during times of war and crises, women and children are usually the most affected. This has been happening in Syria since the uprising of the Syrian revolution when weaponry was used to forcibly displace people.

Although freedom is a precious belief and principle, calls for it have unfolded a lot of positive and negative impacts on women and girls, in particular.

For the past ten years, there have been numerous violations committed against women and girls like arbitrary detention which would take them by surprise at gates of universities, schools and other places, keeping them in prisons which lack all aspects of life and beating them brutally in addition to the verbal and physical insults. After they are released, they face a worse form of injustice represented by the society's negative look towards them and gossips here and there.

Survivors of detention, couldn't survive rockets and missiles which affected women and girls in a way or another. Some of them are still

suffering from psychological traumas and fear of loud noises which turned into a real phobia that needs to be cured. Others have become disabled after losing their hand(s), leg(s) in the shelling and are in need of support from others to walk or do other tasks that require physical effort.

A lot of women have lost a family member or members like their husbands, children, parent(s), or siblings, and some of them have lost their whole families the thing that dramatically has affected their psychological health.

Forcibly displacement and instability have also had negative effects on women and girls. Families had to leave their cities, homes, and possessions and flee to other countries seeking for peace and shelter to ensure the future of their children. It has been difficult for women to adapt to the new society, new culture, and new language the thing that has created a sense of loneliness because of being away from their friends and relatives. In addition, in most of the times, women and girls find themselves forced to work in order to improve the economic and living conditions of their families.

A large part of the Syrian population have



been displaced from their homes and had to live in poorly-equipped camps where there is a complete absence of privacy and security. The spread of cases of rape that were practiced against girls made many families believe that underage marriage was the best solution for the protection of their daughters and sisters without taking into consideration the difficulties that these girls face being wives and mothers.

Camps also suffer from other difficult conditions like the lack of electricity, the scorching summers, the freezing winters, the flooded tents, the spread of illnesses and diseases, and preventing girls from completing their studies due to the unavailability of transportations towards schools and universities, but the worst of all conditions is having no private bathrooms and toilets which makes women and girls worried and insecure all the time. Such examples of women's suffering is a simple part of the overall suffering that the Syrian people in general and the Syrian women in particular have to go through. CSOs must take responsibility of caring for women who have faced psychological traumas and provide a psychologist in each of the camps to listen to the displaced women and help them overcome the stress they go through. Displaced women are also in need of entertainment activities to help them reduce the impact of the difficult situations they have had to face because this plays a great role in accelerating the process of psychological recovery.

Written by Ruba Al-Muhammad

Home Agendas



Home Agendas Project is a youth initiative that has been launched by the media professional Rana Totanji and student Muhammad Da'bul with the aim of shedding light on the youth's skills in the Syrian liberated areas. 27 people including male and female writers, journalists, media professionals and university students took part in providing the information included in the book.

The majority of the stories written in the books were first attempts made by the people who wrote them. The book includes 32 stories that tell the reality of sufferings lived by the Syrians inside Syria. These stories are concentrated on martyrs, war injuries, shelling, widowed, success stories, difficulties faced by residents of the camps, and the challenges faced by the people inside Syria.

Writers also included real-life stories experienced by them through the course of the Syrian revolution. It's worth mentioning that the project took 5 months of preparation. After the book had been completed, it was published through an initiative signing ceremony to reward the team in recognition of their efforts and

to promote them to keep going in producing more literary work in coordination with Al-Ruwad Organization.

Ms. Rana Totanji, the media professional who came up with the idea of this initiative spoke about her experience of writing two stories, the first of which is entitled: (Dedicated to My Dad's Soul and Mon's Struggle). She says: "Through my first story, I reflected my passion about the media work. This is something I inherited from my Dad, Zuheir Totanji, who used to work in journalism. I spoke about the role played by female journalists in northern Syria. The story has also images of the role played by Mom as she brought us up, just like many other Syrian women who had to tolerate a lot of sufferings and act as mothers and fathers simultaneously. My second story is entitled: (Dream Rhythm) and its main character is a young man called Malaz Al-Najjar who was born from inside suffering and pain but has always sought to be indulged in creative work through playing the oud while his mother is accompanying him. Malaz is one example of many Syrian young people who have a lot of competences and talents but lack promotion, support, and opportunities"



News of the sub-committees:

Azaz Sub-committee

Sub-committee of WSU, in cooperation with Bousla Development and Innovation, targeted its members with a professional training on Excel.

15

beneficiary

Sub-committee of Qabsin

Sub-committee of WSU targeted its members with different dialog sessions some of which are: Gender-based Violence Early Marriage The Importance of Organizing Family Affairs

36

beneficiary

لجنة بزلجة

Sub-committee of WSU targeted its members with two dialog sessions under the titles: Negotiation Skills Women's Self-care and Capacity Building

28

beneficiary



A local, non-profit civil society organization for women's affairs, launched in 2018 through a conference attended by more than 150 women in rural northern and eastern Aleppo from Afrin to reaching to Jarablus.

The Unit targets women who have difficulty playing their role optimally in society. It also seeks to empower women politically, economically, culturally and socially in the northern and eastern countryside of Aleppo.



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Syria, Aleppo - Azaz

The geographical zone of the WSU's work: northern and eastern countryside of Aleppo