

## Recognizing the Efforts of Students, Teachers and Donors - A Syrian Refugee School in Lebanon

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*Parents are in an awkward situation as refugees. In their own country, these men would likely be working, but they are likely to feel deep gratitude to those who are helping the ones they love to have a better chance at making a decent life by receiving an education in the camp.*

In an Islamic residential district called Katermaya, fifty kilometers south of Lebanon's capital Beirut, a children's school is operating in a refugee camp, the "School of Wisdom and Learning." On June 3, 2016, the school held a commencement ceremony for students that have completed a year of education. A Wonmo Pyeongae Foundation awards ceremony also took place.

In 2015, three people began undergoing teacher's training for eight months each in kindergarten education, lower-grade elementary school education, and higher-grade elementary school education. Tongil Group employees, many (perhaps most) of whom are not Unificationists, paid for these education programs by donating a portion of their salaries.



*Hermine Schellen, who is among members in Lebanon trying to help refugees there and a Tongil Group representative with one of the many students they took photographs with*

Thus, children who for years have not been able to receive education have gone through a year learning in what is essentially a private school. Students studied Arabic (their native language) mathematics, geography, science and English. Their schooling took place through even in the hottest month of July and the coldest month of December. Thanks to the teacher's hard work the children can read and write and their faces have become brighter.

In 2016, the Wonmo Pyeongae Foundation provided ₩10,000,000 (US\$8,500) worth of scholarships and from this past March the second year of education began. We were able to select two additional capable teachers after a preparation period. On June 3, students who had completed the one-year curriculum received certificates and we held a Wonmo Pyeongae Foundation scholarship award ceremony.

The children applauded enthusiastically. Though it is not an official school, the certificates represented their worthwhile efforts to study.

Each of the certificates is in the name of the Universal Peace Federation. The missionary family that had cared for this place from the beginning and the newly appointed local national leader are working together to care for it.

After the event, an old woman who was caring for an orphan came to us and said with warmth, "You have worked hard, thank you." We plan to care for these children even in the coldest of winter without rest as if

they were our own children. It is a relief to have this opportunity to be able to care for even a few of the 1,500,000 Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR, Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world in proportion to its population size.



### **Life in a refugee camp**

To aid our readers' understanding we are reprinting a description from an event held in the home of David and Patricia Earle in 2013. The descriptions come from experiences in a camp in Syria itself, but nonetheless describe the plight of the refugees who have lost homes, family members and the normal life they once knew.

Marwa Kuwaideri is a British Syrian. She is the program development manager for the Human Care Foundation Worldwide (HCFW) which now specifically focuses on helping Syrian people. They aim their humanitarian at the more than 1 million refugees, over 500,000 of whom are children.

Aided by large photographs which she had brought, Marwa described working in one refugee camp where, out of three hundred and forty families, a hundred women are widows! Many of the people had had to flee not because of fear but simply because of the destruction of their homes and all possessions. HCFW is trying to provide baskets and formula milk, and working with other organizations to try to provide clean water.

Many areas are total disaster zones, and they work to help people on both sides of the divide.

In another camp of 15,000 people, she described how the children there had no smiles on their faces, hard and bitter from their traumatic experiences during the war, having lost everything including their childhood. Aid organizations conduct "workshops" in an attempt to begin the long process of healing the trauma, rebuilding the children as human beings, and restoring their faith in humanity.

One of the worst feelings for Marwa was when desperately hungry people asked her for food but she had none to give. She said there needs to be much more media coverage of the humanitarian catastrophe, rather than simply reporting on the conflict.

### **Driven from their homes**

Shaima Saif was the third of our main speakers, an assistant at the Yemeni Forum women's group in Birmingham. Shaima has just finished a Masters Degree in International Development, and spoke about some of the recent history leading up to the crisis in Syria. She talked about the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in 2011 and 2012, in reaction to a twenty-six-year-old street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, who committed suicide by setting himself on fire in front of government offices, having been abused by government inspectors who took his fruit. The anger that arose from his senseless death set off protests

over the state of poverty and child hunger in the country. President Ben Ali stepped down, after twenty-three years in power, less than two weeks after Mr. Bouazizi died. This led to developments in other Middle East countries including Egypt, Libya and Yemen, with popular protests against corruption, championing freedom, human rights, democracy and the basic needs of the people.

In Syria, protests began when a group of thirteen and fourteen-yearold children, who had written graffiti in a public place, were arrested, taken into detention, tortured and some even killed. Uprisings and further protests began in the south of the country, eventually spreading north throughout the whole of Syria. The conflict has displaced huge numbers of people. Shaima's father went to visit one refugee camp in Lebanon. At that time, no aid organizations were working there, but in this case the people had "fire in their bellies" and were relatively happy, even in such a miserable situation, accepting the cost of being part of a big movement for human rights, hoping and believing that permanent, positive change is coming.

One woman asked Shaima if women were coming together to try to protest, and bring an end to the violence in Syria. She replied that there had been a number of strong protests initially, but some women were arrested and tortured, and then many of the more educated women fled for their safety. Many of the women who reached the refugee camps were tired, exhausted by the length of the conflict and going through such harrowing experiences, even losing their "womanhood" and motherly instinct to care for their children. Women were losing their motherliness, and children their childhood -- experiencing only sadness and despair.