

# #NOLOST GENERATION

## WHS Side Event: Empowering Youth Affected by the Syria Crisis

Moderator: **Lyse Doucet**, BBC journalist

Introductory Remarks: **Anthony Lake**, Executive Director, UNICEF

### Youth Panel Speakers:

- **Ahmed Saqer**, 17-year old Palestinian Syrian refugee, participant in Mercy Corps' youth program in Tyre, Lebanon
- **Rawan Jalabneh**, 23-year old Jordanian chemist working in Za'atari camp in Jordan
- **Hamzah Ali Jumaa**, 15-year old Syrian, participant in Mercy Corps' youth program in Gaziantep, Turkey
- **Hiba Nibulsi**, 20-year old Jordanian, participant in UNHCR's Global Refugee Youth Consultation
- **Mohammed Taleb Zamzam**, 22-year old Syrian student at Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul

### Expert Panel Speakers:

- **Dr. Bekir Gür**, Advisor to Minister of National Education, Turkey
- **Wessam Saabaneh**, Director and Co-founder of Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development
- **Baroness Verma**, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for International Development, UK
- **Hikmet Ersek**, President and CEO, Western Union

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### Summary:

The "Empowering Youth Affected by the Syria Crisis" side event was organized by the No Lost Generation initiative in order to focus the attention of conference participants on the urgent situation facing adolescents and youth affected by the Syria crisis and to provide a global platform to focus on the positive message of what youth can contribute to the future of their countries. The No Lost Generation was launched in 2013 that leverages the efforts of UN agencies, NGOs and international donors to ensure that the four million Syrian and other vulnerable children and youth in the region have the chance to learn, recover, and contribute to their communities. The two-panel event fostered a conversation between 5 youth affected by the Syria crisis who shared personal accounts of their experience, outlined key challenges, and made recommendations to key decision-makers attending the World Humanitarian Summit. Building on the perspectives of these youth and the constituencies they represent, a second panel of influential thought-leaders and experts responded with ideas of how to secure the futures for youth affected by the Syria crisis and set a positive course forward.

Five youth speakers addressed core issues touching on key protection concerns for Syrian youth – they noted negative impact of social tension among refugee and host communities, early marriage and gender-based violence, restrictions of freedom of movement, obstacles to family reunification, and challenges to acquiring official



documentation and certification. The youth asserted several key recommendations to key decision-makers: 1) expand programs that bring together refugee and host community youth to enhance integration and address discrimination by building constructive relationships around shared interests and community-building activities; 2) support programs that give adolescents and youth the tools to engage in a positive way in the civic life of their communities; and 3) expedite and facilitate access to civil registration and documentation for refugee youth who lack to better access education, health services, and freedom of movement.

The second area of focus was the importance of ensuring safe access to quality education for youth inside Syria and in the neighboring countries, and all panelists agreed this must be a crucial area of investment for the current response to the Syrian crisis. The youth speakers called for new efforts to overcome key barriers to education, including certification problems (Syrian exams are not recognized universally in refugee hosting countries), lack of civil documentation (which can lead to non-graduation of Syrian students after years of study) and the pressure to earn income to support their families resulting in high rates of child labor and high numbers of adolescents leaving school. They noted that violence exacerbates the issue: Syrian adolescents are often subjected to discrimination and bullying, which prompts many to drop out of school, and increasing incidence of child marriage and pull younger girls out of school. Youth speakers cited the success of non-formal and formal education programs, although the funding for education-related programming remains inadequate. Other solutions identified included the provision of on-line education, the establishment of Syrian student liaison platforms to coordinate certification and education provision; and the establishment of scholarships for Syrian university students – something already in place in Turkey, but needing more expansion.

#### **YOUTH PANELISTS:**

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**Ahmed Saqer:** “I was bullied by kids who thought I didn’t belong in their school and beaten by teachers who thought this was the only way to teach us how to behave – so I dropped out of school. I signed up at Mercy Corps’ Bussma center, and started classes in English and computers and car repair, and made a lot of friends. We stopped looking at our nationalities and started concentrated on our commonalities. We ask this audience for three things: 1) institute programs that mitigate violence; 2) enable refugee and host communities to better integrate through joint activities; and 3) relax legal obstacles to formal employment for Syrian and Palestinian youth.

**Rawan Jalabneh:** “I work with many girls in Zaatari camp who are pressured into early marriages – it’s true that in Syria early marriage was accepted, but the displacement has exacerbated this issue. The pressure is high and the price they pay is high – maternal health is suffering. Please stand beside those girls – they are vulnerable and they are not just numbers.”

**Hamza Jumaa:** “Through the SMART art program, I realized that I’m not always right – I listened to other opinions about the war and what is happening in Syria, and they listened to mine. Even though Syrian youth have faced a lot of challenges, we can do a lot to reach our goals. Yes, we want to return to our country, but we also want to feel accepted in our community here.”

**Hiba al-Nabulsi:** “Family unity was a priority among all the refugee youth in the UNHCR consultations –the problem is that people can’t cross borders or move between the camps, so the families are separated. Families should be together, not divided across camps, across continents.”

**Mohammed Taleb Zamzam:** “My story is not unique; it is the story of hundreds of thousands of Syrians – but 99% of the time the ending is not positive. After consulting a lot of Syrian students in Turkey, I identified two critical issues – we need official documentation – passports and identity cards – that will help us continue our education and access other services. Even myself, I don’t have an identity card, and if I don’t figure out a solution to this problem, I won’t

be able to graduate. We Syrians are the ones who are going to rebuild Syria – it is just your destiny to pave the way for us.”

## **EXPERT PANEL**

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**Dr. Bekir Gür**, Advisor to Minister of National Education, Turkey

“Education is the essential key for protection and integration. After several years, we realized that we needed to shift our education strategy – at first, we provided a camp-based strategy with Arabic language instruction in camps, but now we are also provided Arabic language education in public schools, and we are integrated Syrian students in regular Turkish classes. We know language is a big barrier so we are providing lots of classes and we are working to do better in coordination in terms of proficiency exams.”

**Baroness Verma**, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for International Development, UK

“Education is not a luxury, it should be every child’s birthright. Across the world, 75 million children and youth are not in schools, and the majority are girls – the safety and security of girls needs to be at the heart of our approach when we are delivering our services. The UK is the second largest donor and we are committed to continuing this, but we can’t afford to leave the youth voice out of this effort – and to make sure that girls are represented as well.

“Wherever you’re going to be, we understand that refugee youth need to feel wanted among the people they are living with – and the message should go out strongly: it is not your choice to be living far away from home, but it is the choice of the host countries about how they treat and embrace you.”

**Wesam Saabaneh**, co-founder of Jafra Foundation

“I’m not speaking on behalf of Jafra only, but on behalf of the hundreds of Syrian NGOs that are risking their lives on a daily basis to deliver a food basket or teach a child. There are thousands of teachers who are volunteering to teach through informal programs to reach young people and continue their education. We are combining our humanitarian work with livelihoods projects to empower youth with the prospect of a future. Youth will be the future of Syria, but will also be the key to your own future. Your children will not be happy in the future if there is injustice, war, and displacement.”

**Hikmet Ersek**, CEO Western Union

“Western Union is engaged in 200 countries, including Syria, and when we look at the diversity of our customer base, we are struck by the power of being an immigrant, the power of being a migrant, and the power of being different. The stories we heard from Mohamed and Hamza about their motivating to work hard and keep studying is the product of being a migrant and having to work extra hard just to ensure that their education could continue. It’s no coincidence that most of the Fortune 500 companies are led by migrants or refugees, in fact, Western Union was built by migrants. When our customers are making money transfers, they are thinking about their families back home – they are thinking about how to support their children to access better education because this is the key to success”.

**Anthony Lake**, UNICEF Executive Director:

“Over the course of the WHS, we are going to hear countless stories of victims who are suffering from various crises – but the voices we just heard from are not simply victims to call upon our compassion, they are strong young people fighting bravely for their own futures and the future of their own societies. Let us support them not out pity but out of admiration for what they are doing in their own lives and for others.”