

# Generation of Syrian children at risk of growing up 'angry and illiterate' – UN official

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There is no reward to be won in Syria, a top United Nations child rights official said today, stressing that without a political solution, children will continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, leaving a generation that will grow into angry, illiterate adults.

There is no reward to be won in Syria, a top United Nations child rights official said after visiting the region, stressing today that without a political solution, children will continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, leaving a generation of angry, illiterate adults.

“They have lost their families, lost their house, they lost hope. They are full of anger – I repeated this, they are full of anger, and if it continues, we will face a generation of illiterates,” Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, told journalists in New York.

The press conference is Ms. Zerrougui’s first since returning from a nearly month long visit to Syria and neighbouring Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, to see first-hand the impact of the conflict on children, to report, and to show those who are violating children’s rights that there is a professional system for gathering and assessing the credibility of information that would ultimately hold them accountable for breaking international laws, she said.

During her visit, the envoy met with Government officials and had contacts with members of opposition groups. She urged all parties in Syria to take urgent measures to protect children and other civilians, highlighting that the Government is on the UN’s “list

of shame” for killing and maiming children, as well as attacking schools and hospitals, while the opposition has been enlisting recruits under the age of 18.

The list is used by the Security Council to indicate to the world those groups, individuals and Governments violating the rights of children and where they are active.

Ms. Zerrougui stressed that the list is a “tool that allows us to have influence,” and even if the perpetrators feel safe today, “we know by heart that those who commit violations will pay.”

She recalled visiting a local hospital, “You cannot imagine when you see a child without a leg, and he’s telling you, they will fix my leg and I will go to fight. And you see the brother that is lying on the bed that lost a kidney, that lost a pancreas, and you see the mother sitting there. That is the reality.”

In addition, the Special Representative also raised the issue of detention of underage recruits, predominantly with the Government. “I had a very fruitful discussion to say this is your responsibility. You cannot just consider that you are fighting terrorism, you have to also work with part of your population which is not happy that is not happy with how it is treated.”

Since fighting began in March 2011 between the Syrian Government and opposition groups seeking to oust President Bashar Al-Assad as many as 100,000 people have been killed, almost 2 million have fled to neighbouring countries and a further 4 million have been internally displaced.

Inside Syria, 6.8 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance, half of whom are children.

Among the main problems in the region as a result of the displacement of families is the disruption to schooling. While neighbouring countries have attempted to assist, Ms. Zerrougui said, problems continue as a result of curriculum, capacity and language.

In addition, refugees are faced with the problem of certification - who will give you the recognition that your schooling has value and you will have a degree, the Special Representative added.

Comparing the current situation in Syria with what Ms. Zerrougui experiences during her last visit in December, the Special Representative noted the increasing polarization of society between those who are against the Government and those who are for.

“There is no reward to be won in Syria,” the Special Representative stressed. “The Government today is feeling that they are winning. We need to work with them to let them understand that the only way to bring them together is to bring society together. And to understand that there is grievance and there is a need to move forward on a political agenda.”





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