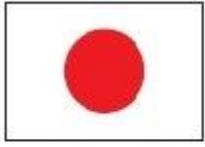


Joint news supplement
Peace Building in Lebanon



من الشعب الياباني
From the People of Japan



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

بناء السلام

Special Issue

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Between
Hermel and
Homs, the
Assi River...
and great
longing

Arsal pays a high price for
sheltering refugees; Syrians
account for three times its
population

The Syrian displacement: economic
advantages of a humanitarian crisis

The smell of the distant Syria
comes out of kitchens in Lebanon



Kin relations: do
they increase
family bonds or
topple them?



Credit: Chantal Partamian

UNDP supports host communities, works on basic services and social cohesion

Conveying positive messages on the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon cannot be an easy mission. Some might find it ironic, others impossible. For UNDP, it was a challenge. The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has currently exceeded one million refugees - equivalent to 80 million for the United States - more refugees per capita than any other country in the world. The bulk of the Syrian refugees are in the parts of the country where the majority of Lebanese are poor. It should also be noted that nearly 30% of the Lebanese population was classified as living below the poverty line prior to the influx of refugees.

The impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon has been and still is very heavy especially on those less fortunate among the Lebanese who do not have spaces to rent out or own shops where food vouchers can be redeemed. And yet, heroically, with all its difficulties, the country is still somehow managing.

As the Syrian crisis extends into the fourth year, the need to support the livelihoods of both refugee and host communities is paramount. The need to exert more efforts to support social cohesion between the communities is also growing.

As such and since the beginning of the crisis, UNDP has highlighted the remarkable solidarity of the Lebanese people and stressed the importance of providing support to the Lebanese host communities, especially in the most vulnerable areas.

The Programme is committed in different ways to continue working and supporting host communities in order to alleviate pressures. In this context, UNDP has been engaging with national media to promote a culture of peace and tolerance.

In fact, in this joint news supplement, distributed for free with both *Annahar* and *As-Safir* newspapers, journalists from *Annahar*, *As-Safir*, *Al-Hayat* newspapers, *Now website* and *Al-Modon* electronic newspapers shared their views in one common space, and attempted to highlight the extraordinary resilience of Lebanese host communities and the positive impact – despite burdens - of Syrian and Lebanese living together and coping with the situation.

At this juncture, initiatives like this joint news supplement are needed to mitigate tensions between Syrians and Lebanese. In this issue, you will read stories about Lebanese men and women who opened their homes and communities to refugees forced to leave their own. In the next issues, journalists from different media outlets will contribute, through their articles to explore and identify real stories that reflect the situation with an eye to alleviate tensions and to foster a better social interaction between Lebanese and Syrians, as well as a better social cohesion among Lebanese communities.

Contrary to the views of many, we are not in the country because of the Syrian crisis. The UN has been here for decades through multiple crises and will remain to be here after the end of this crisis. We are here for Lebanon. Even in dealing with the refugee influx, we are here for Lebanon. Together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and other national partners we are working through the Lebanon Host

Communities Support Programme to support the livelihoods, improve basic services, and promote social cohesion in the most affected Lebanese towns and villages.

Ross Mountain

UNDP Resident Representative

Japan continues the “human-centered” assistance to Lebanon

The year 2014 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Lebanon. During this period, the relationship between these two countries has been strengthened via diplomatic ties, economic cooperation, business networks and cultural exchanges. We sincerely desire to further develop even closer cooperative ties between the two countries.

Amid the current refugee crisis in Lebanon, I would like to draw the readers’ attention to the concept of “human security”, which aims to protect people from critical and pervasive threats to human lives, livelihoods and dignity, and thus to enhance human fulfillment. The Government of Japan has been supporting the concept through establishing an international commission on human security as well as the Trust Fund for Human Security and positioning “human security” as one of the key perspectives of the Japanese diplomacy. Today, we face a complex set of threats such as violence, hunger, water shortage, epidemic and poverty, which goes beyond borders. To tackle these threats, we should build and sustain societies that enhance peoples’ capabilities, since the traditional concept of “state security” alone may no longer be sufficient.

Under the pressing need to protect human security, the Government of Japan has been extending its assistance to Lebanon to tackle the current refugee crisis. So far, more than 55 million dollars have been allocated to Lebanon as the emergency humanitarian assistance to the refugees as well as the host communities. The funds are channelled through the Government of Lebanon, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, the Embassy of Japan, together with the local NGOs and municipalities, recently launched 10 new projects through the Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Program (GGP) in the field of education, health care, water supply, social welfare and unexploded ordinance clearance. Particular attentions are paid for protecting the most vulnerable people and empowering the local communities.

We should keep in mind that each of us is equal in having own potential and should be respected as a human being regardless of nationality, race, gender, religion, ethnic identity and other characteristics. The Government of Japan will continue its support to Lebanon based on the “human-centered” perspective.

Seiichi Otsuka
Ambassador of Japan

The Syrian Asylum: the humanitarian community's case

The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon is larger than what this small country submerged in its own security, economic and social problems for more than half a century can handle. Bidding in this subject is unconstructive as it does not offer any solutions to the aggravating problems nor do the publicly declared opinions of politicians, civil society and human rights organizations. In fact, they are the ones who mostly escape from facing critical issues and are content with following to their written agendas.

Local perceptions towards Syrian refugees should be neither hostile, discriminatory nor exploitative. We should rather see and deal with the current situation with some positivism and pragmatism.

From a humanitarian perspective, the current situation makes us sympathize with the Syrians as they have fled wars, killings and destruction; and having an adequate standard of living is their right as is to every human being. It is unacceptable to close the borders between the two countries in the face of any person whose life is endangered be it refugees with or against the regime. This too is their right, the right to freedom of expression, which we have long called for and defended in Lebanon.

In fact, the Syrian refugees do not come from the same basket; some are poor - and being poor is not a vice - whereas others are businessmen who entirely or partially relocated their businesses to Lebanon and became an integral part of the Lebanese economy. The more fortunate bought or rented apartments which boosted the real estate market after a long period of stagnation caused by the declined flow of Arabs to Lebanon. Hence, real estate prices began to stabilize and even increase.

If we even look back in time, that is before the Syrian war, we would find a large amount of Syrian cash flow in the Lebanese banks and that many of the fortunate families of Beirut have strong ties with Damascus or Aleppo. They have in fact moved and settled in Lebanon a long time ago, creating the backbone of its economy in different sectors.

Lebanon should not be held solely responsible to solve the Syrian refugee crisis; that would be a nightmare and the refugees would become a heavy burden as well as a rejected and neglected entity. Hence, it must be the entire Arab world's and the international community's responsibility, cooperating together with the refugees to prevent any terrorist groups from sheltering and abusing them, and providing common solutions to protect them from the disadvantages of displacement as well as ensuring their safe return to their homeland.

Ghassan Hajjar

Editor in Chief – Annahar newspaper

“Oh Maryam”

She wanders in the muddy alleyways with her soft bare feet. She notices kids playing with a very old ball. As she tries reluctantly to approach them and join them to play, they push her away from the spot that has now become their playground shouting at her “there is no place for girls in our playground.”

She continues her walk inattentively, when she suddenly notices a shining metal at the edge of the road. She bends down and picks up a two hundred fifty Lebanese Liras coin. She looks around her, hesitant for a while, and drops it back on the ground. She remembers that her parents had sent her on a mission, which was to check when her family could receive the financial assistance from the center.

When she arrives there, she encounters a kind young lady and an older woman who seems grumpy the entire time. Maryam tries to avoid the latter for only a short period. “Hey, you, what do you want?” shouts the older woman. At this moment, the kind lady tries to interfere to calm the situation but Maryam, terrified, gazes at them and blushes. She is trying to remember the reason she came to the center.

All of a sudden, she ran till she reached the campsite. She saw her mother feeding her brother in the corner, while her dad was laying on the ground listening to the news through an old radio. He looked at her and said, “what did they tell you?”. She panicked again. She ran and climbed the nearby hill and sat as far as possible from the piled dump in the area.

She closed her eyes and let her imagination take her back to her homeland: the house was shaded by a grapevine, and in the center, there was a small fountain and an orange tree that had a beautiful aroma.

How much did she long for Sana'.

Her mother had taught her how to collect small branches and create a female doll. Since then, Maryam always had Sana' in her hand. She used to hide her in her bag when going to school and made sure that no one saw her doll. At night, she used to reveal secrets to Sana', hug her and fall asleep.

The day the ground moved beneath her feet, and the house engulfed in flames, Maryam held her mother's hand and ran after her father who was carrying her two little brothers. She cried and screamed calling for Sana' but the sound of shelling overshadowed hers.

She does not recall much. She remembers walking for long distances with torn clothes and shoes. They were hungry, thirsty and slept in the fields. Then she found herself in this tent, without Sana'.

She cries. She hates the doll her mother made for her. She finds her weird; sometimes the doll stares at her with arrogance and other times with pity. The new doll resembles the citizens of this country. As for Sana', she was from Aleppo.

It was already dark when Maryam decided to leave the hill. She walked absentmindedly and did not feel a rough hand pulling her into a black car in which three men were sitting. The car pulled off quickly and disappeared. And so did she.

Her name was Maryam. She was from Aleppo. She was born there few years ago. She wandered in its alleys and was unaware that her surrounding was classified as international heritage in 1986. She loved the unique and diverse buildings in her city, but she did not know that this diversity stemmed from the convergence of Seljuk and Byzantine architecture, as well as the Mamluk and Ottoman styles.

She loved to stare at the old buildings, and she will never know that these religious schools, bathes, mosques and churches date back to the 13th and 14th centuries A.D.

When she used to go for a stroll in her religiously and ethnically diverse city, she was unaware that the International Academy of Gastronomy in France had awarded her city a cultural gastronomy prize in 2007.

Maryam will never know that she left Sana' in the capital of fine arts, music, and theatre. Maryam could have gone to one of the famous Aleppan art schools only if the time was different. She might have liked to learn Arabic calligraphy or maybe Arabic literature and poetry following the footsteps of Omar Abu Risha and others.

She was from Aleppo, the city which was ruled by Sayf Al-Dawla who was fond of science. Even earlier, famous doctors and scientists, as well as philosophers and thinkers like Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina received their education there. Al-Mutanabbi lived on its land, so did Abu Firas Al-Hamdani, Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isfahani who wrote The Book of Songs and many other books and poems.

Her name was Maryam. She was born in the right place, at the wrong time.

Aleppo's girl had been homeless in a camp for refugees living under harsh conditions. No one knows when they will be returning home.

Her name was Maryam. She was born in Aleppo few years ago. A foreign land took away her childhood before she had the chance to discover the treasure she was born in.

Another Maryam lived here sixty years ago. She was wandering in the muddy alleys of a foreign land. She too was eager to return to her homeland and see Sana', in Yafa.

Hanadi Salman
Managing Editor
Assafir newspaper

Between Hermel and Homs, the Assi River... and great longing



By Bou Madiane Al-Sahili

Homs has always been present in Hermel. Its Qattinah lake lays out before the eyes of Hermel's citizens on clear days and its souks have always provided their basic needs long before the eruption of the war; not only before borders were drawn in the 1950s but also after they were set at Jousieh town where people on each side of the borders monitored the busy road traffic for the first time. As a matter of fact, residents of Hermel found many ways to Homs through their city's north and east as the proverb says "all roads lead to Rome".



Hermel's inhabitants are a living proof that Homs had always been a favorite and routine destination; their love for the city was much stronger despite its equal distance from Baalbeck. They were charmed by the town of Deek El-Jan early on and became accustomed to its shops which offered expensive but high quality items. The joy of being in Homs would not be fulfilled without savoring the sweetest baklava or visiting the clothing, jewelry and furniture shops. Homs' heaters protected them from

*Abu Abdallah relocated the first-ever Matteh pipe factory to Lebanon
(credit: Bou Madiane Al-Sahili)*

their harsh winters. Its schools and universities offered them a quality education hard to find in Hermel, and graduated doctors and engineers.

Unfortunately, the current war in Homs has filled their lives with pain and sorrow. Their Homs which has always been in their hearts and minds is in flames and being turned into ruins; all they can do is remember the voices of its people and their heartwarming smiles. In fact, some of the Homsis have relocated to Hermel, built houses, opened businesses, and yet are eager to return to their homeland and friends. Nevertheless, they appreciate the sympathy of the locals which made them regain their faith in life, and are happy to talk to them with their Homs accent and welcome them in their stores, seemingly declaring “here is Homs” out of love and attachment to their homeland.

The Homsis in Hermel are working hard to create new spaces for themselves to pursue their professions despite the hardships they have been - and still are - enduring, maybe to occupy themselves during the harsh times that have lasted for three years now, but most definitely because they appreciate life and believe in coexistence and in spreading love. Their high spirit is what keeps them moving forward and they insist that only with love can they face hatred.

Hermel's Homsis – will keep their vows – giving hope to its people, and offering them kindness; that is their only spell against destruction.

Their city plays an essential role in Hermel residents' lives as they spent their free time wandering in its streets. Now, they are orphans without it and all they can say is “pity Homs”.

It is very unusual to find a heater in Hermel that was not manufactured in Homs, as if Homs is returning the favor for having access to Assi's water, a river unlike others in the area, disobeyed the typical direction of flow and headed north to Homs. What great desserts and beautiful days Homs had offered... God bless Homs.

Ashrafieh's Syrians: boosted its economy, introduced vitality and diversity

By Rayan Majed

Shams arrived to Lebanon from Syria a year and five months ago. She chose to stay in Ashrafieh, in an area close to where she works at an association concerned with Syrian art. She has moved from four houses in total, three of them were in Fassouh and the fourth next to Hotel Dieu Hospital where rents range from 650 to 1000 dollars a month. "When I first arrived to Beirut, my friends who were already here told me to say that I am a Christian lady looking for housing in case the landlords asked about my religion, so they would accept to give me the apartment," said Shams.

"But the situation has changed a while ago due to the high demand for housing. So, economic and financial interests overshadowed their other concerns and landlords began asking for really high prices. However, they are still those who do not accept to rent out to Syrians, and once they hear your accent on the phone, they apologize. One of them even reminded me of the history of the Lebanese-Syrian relations," she continued.

Shams explained that more than 30 of her friends have rented apartments in Ashrafieh over the past year and are paying almost their entire salary on rent. They know very well they are being exploited but they have no other choice.

The *mukhtar* of Ashrafieh Jerji Maamari said that 60% of the rental contracts are being officially registered whereas the remaining are not, which means that many landlords are not paying the municipality fees.

In fact, the eight-storey building Shams lives in is mainly inhabited by Syrians. "There are artists, researchers and workers in associations," she said. They are not "terrorist projects and ticking bombs," she added referring to the statements made by previous prime minister Nicolas Sehnaoui and member of the Free Patriotic Movement Ziad Abs at a press conference held last March on the "Repercussions of the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon".

Khaled, a Syrian journalist, also moved from Hamra to Ashrafieh almost a year ago. He described being provoked in Hamra due to the Syrian Social Nationalist party's presence in the neighborhood he lived in. Now, he resides in Fassouh and pays 800 dollars for a one bedroom apartment. "Around 20 of my friends live here in this neighborhood," he said.

The majority of Syrians residing in Ashrafieh are located in its old narrow streets such as Jeitaoui, Fassouh and El-Rmeil. "The average age of the residents there is 60. The only ones below that age are Syrians," said Shams laughing. Actually, an old man who was first hesitant to talk to us thinking we are from the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses, explained that the younger generation that was born in El-Rmeil got married and moved to another area; so did his daughter who was sitting next to him in his small garden.

Shams continued, "what we love about these neighborhoods is that they are rural. We love to pass by their stairs, their old houses and the chickens that live outside. It gives you a feeling of intimacy and we, Syrians, are looking for that and we cannot find it anywhere else in Beirut. Strangely, this is not a

source of pride for many Lebanese."

In addition to the high rent Syrians pay in Ashrafieh, the businesses of cable TV, internet and power generator providers have "blossomed" in the region. "It's impossible for Syrians to live without internet," said Shams.

During the day, the Starbucks coffee shop on Sassine Square becomes a meeting spot for Syrians and at night, they roam around Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael, and meet-up in bars. Also, Syrians are culturally active in Beirut, participating in events and spending time at the movie theatres in Ashrafieh to run away from the devastating news they hear about their country. These all have contributed positively in boosting the economy of the region.

"Despite the slowdown of the economic growth since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution and the declining performance of the major sectors of the Lebanese economy (particularly tourism), it is essential to notice the positive impact on the Lebanese market's depreciation pattern as a result of the increase in consumer demands," explained economic expert Lara Batlouni.



Sassine Square has become a meeting point for Syrians (credit: Talal Khoury)

"We cannot ignore the new economic movement that was born with the growth of internal demand on goods and services due to the influx of Syrian refugees

into Lebanon. However, we can definitely distinguish between two categories of new consumers: the better-off and less fortunate, and as such we have two types of internal demand on goods and services," said Batlouni.

She explained that the latter category contributes in "boosting the regional economy in a limited way since the demands are restricted on necessities whereas the former category creates a rift in the

economy of the region they frequent as they generally tend to rent a living space." In fact, Batlouni said that the striking high prices of leases in certain areas are not in-line with the slow movement of real estate sales. "The better-off category also revives other sectors related to leasing, such as subscribing with electricity generators, and television cable providers," she said adding that this "positively affects the movement of local trades such as food and beverage shops, clothing stores, barber shops, nearby restaurants as well as transportation and communication services."

According to Batlouni, Lebanon's economic loss which resulted from the decline of tourism has been partially compensated for by the influx of asylum seekers who revived other alternative sectors.

Unfortunately, many of the region's inhabitants as well as its politicians do not notice the positive impact of the Syrian presence as well as the diversity and vitality they added to the area.

"On daily basis, we hear hundreds of insults from cab drivers in Ashrafieh, and cursing the Syrian 'son of a bitch'. One day, I gave the driver 2000 liras and told him this money is from the Syrian 'son of a bitch' that is commuting with you and making you earn your living. All he could do was stare at me in shock as the stereotype he had of Syrians did not apply to me. After-all, I was wearing a sleeveless shirt," said Shams.

The workers

Shams returns home from her party in Mar Mikhael on foot. Neither she nor her friends have ever witnessed Syrian workers assaulting anyone she said as a response to what has been circulated. They are "miserable" persons who walk "their head to the ground" avoiding problems, she argued in their defense.



Syrians work under harsh conditions and some sleep on construction sites (credit: Talal Khoury)

In fact, at least 40 construction sites are present in Ashrafieh according to a cement contractor we met in one of the region's largest sites. "These projects have been in progress for the past two years. There are no new projects," he said.

On each construction site, there are around 40 to 120 Syrian workers living in harsh conditions, working from seven in the morning till five in the afternoon, earning between 15 and 20 dollars a day. Some of them come early morning from Sabra, Tripoli or Halba in a van and return after work, while others sleep on the site or share an apartment with ten other workers.

In fact, after the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, the workers were obliged to relocate their families to Lebanon. One supervisor of a construction site in Karm El-Zeitoun in Ashrafieh brought his family to Lebanon a year ago and is currently living in a small apartment on the rooftop of one of the buildings in the Syriac neighborhood in Ashrafieh. He is paying 400 dollars for rent. "Prices are increasing. I am looking for another apartment because the landlord wants me to move out so he would be able to rent it out with a higher price," complained Mohammad.

"They argue about the number of persons living in each room. What can they do? Where can they sleep unable to afford rent? Do they want them to spend their night and day on construction sites?" argued Khaled.

"Why not look at the Syrian workers as those who built their homes, and see their presence as a source of diversity and vitality, and an opportunity to build new Lebanese-Syrian relations on new grounds and break the stereotypical image that both parties have of each other?," wondered Rima, a Lebanese young lady who discovered Ashrafieh's neighborhoods through her Syrian friends living in the area. "We will have much better results than spreading hatred and intimidation. They have brought intimacy to these neighborhoods and did not turn them into barracks as some claim. Mostly what I love there is the smell of the barbeque that spreads out of the houses of Syrians which seems to outrage some of the local residents," concluded Rima.

Arsal pays a high price for sheltering refugees; Syrians account for three times its population

By Saada Allaw

Seven-year-old Maryam sits next to her father on a dirt hill in the suburbs of Arsal watching a herd of sheep eat the growing grass on Arsal's distant mountains. This little girl was displaced along with 35 members of her family from the town of Sahel in the Syrian Qalamoun area. She has still not seen the town of Arsal. Their neighbors who had arrived before them had told them that the houses of Arsal have been flooded with refugees and that its surrounding lands have been filled with tents. As such, Maryam's father, Abu Ibrahim, chose to stay in the remote area, far away from the town.

Her father says that the family of Mahmoud Al-Houjayri offered them an agricultural shack, allowed them to erect three tents next to it, and most importantly, turned a blind eye to the fact he had escorted about 200 sheep to the territory. In his turn, Al-Houjayri owns a significant herd of sheep and had told Abu Ibrahim "what is ours is yours. Welcome. We will share the pasture as well."

Al-Houjayri's position is no exception to Arsal. This town which is isolated from Lebanon can be reached only through the winding and narrow roads that link it to the village of Laboueh in northern Bekaa. Arsal has embraced and welcomed the largest number of Syrian refugees regardless of the negative effects the displacement has had on all the aspects of the town.

Not far from Abu Ibrahim's tent, Haidar Al-Flaiti is busy installing his own. The man fled from the Lebanese town of Tfeil located on Syrian lands. Tfeil is the same town that the President of the Republic Michel Sleiman recently talked about and stressed on building a road linking it to Lebanon, its motherland. Unfortunately, the Lebanese government and its citizens have forgotten about Tfeil and its people since the independence until today.

According to Al-Flaiti, nobody stood beside the Lebanese displaced from Syria. Only Arsal did and here is Mustafa Ezzedine, a local, helping Al-Flaiti build a farm to shelter his six cows near his tent. "Without them, without Arsal's locals, we would have found ourselves homeless," he says.

The solidarity seen in Arsal describes its citizens' well-known generosity and compassion. Arsal, which suffers from ongoing neglect and official geographic isolation, has shared the little it owns with the Syrians who have fled the flames of war. In fact, this stance is not new to the town of Arsal as it had a friendly history with Syria and its people.

This little town is located on the slopes of the eastern Lebanon Mountain range, specifically halfway between the Syrian and Lebanese edges and it is only accessible through the village of Laboueh. In fact, it has never turned its back to the Syrian side. The relationship it has with the Syrians is historic and has not been affected by the drawing of borders after the Sykes-Picot agreement. It has remained Syrians' favorite destination for commerce, a border trade which Lebanese authorities consider as smuggling. Their interests were entrenched in business partnerships, and kinship relationships.

According to the mayor of Arsal Ali Al-Houjayri, the number of Syrian refugees registered in the municipality reached 120,000 noting that at least 10,000 Syrians are not registered. Some of them

have been displaced following the recent battles that took place in and around Rankous, and its surrounding Asal El-Ward, in addition to those who fled from Qara, Yabroud, Deir Attieh, Jarajir and other areas.

Despite the fact that the distribution of refugees in Lebanon is generally based on politics, religion, and sect, Aرسال's increasing number of refugees is due to its strategic location. Aرسال's land border extends on an area of 60 kilometers open to Qusayr and its villages from one side, and to Qalamoun Al-Faw'a till Al-Zabdani in Damascus on the other. And most importantly, Aرسال has and still is, the haven for Syrians escaping the heavy fighting in their country.



Furthermore, the locals in Aرسال did not collect rent for the shelter they provided to the displaced during the first

mont A Syrian refugee cooks for her family (credit: Saada Allaw)

hs of

the Syrian clashes; even the less fortunate opened their homes to Syrians. They shared together housing, and those who did not own large houses offered their rooms and shared kitchens and toilets.

Rima Al-Flayti who led civil campaigns to collect donations for the displaced since the beginning of crisis, says that "every local in Aرسال offered what he could to the refugees. Donations varied from offering homes and rooms, lands where they could erect tents, furniture, carpets and linens, as well as food," explaining that "the locals did not collect rent from the Syrians up until six months after the outbreak of the war in Syria. Citizens alone cannot bear alone the burden of the displaced for several years."

According to the mayor, there are still around 300 Syrian families living in the houses and apartments of locals, who have not yet requested any monetary compensation. He acknowledges that the town is

facing a power shortage due to the "large demand for electricity and the long power interruptions the region faced originally." He says that in addition to electricity, the locals share and water with the displaced and an action plan has been launched to accommodate the large quantities of waste being produced daily from the houses and camps.

In fact, Ferial Dabbousi, a displaced from the Syrian village Qara, adds that the graciousness of Arsal's locals "will remain forever in their debt, long after their return to their homeland, if God permits." Dabbousi works in a clothing store owned by a Syrian displaced from Qara as well. "The locals frequent her store and buy more from her than from their fellow compatriots," she says confirming that there is no discrimination against Syrians in Arsal, "despite the bad economic situation of its residents."

Mahmoud Al-Flayti is an individual who quickly realized the need to create dialogue between Syrians and Arsal's residents in order to prevent disputes and their escalation. He led conflict resolution sessions between the two parties as part of the Cooperative Association for Rural Food Provision. During the sessions, Arsal was divided to seven neighborhoods. The participants grouped the main local actors and prominent Syrians of each neighborhood, and discussed their concerns and challenges posed by the displacement on the host communities.

The project has strengthened the relationships between the locals and their guests. They began visiting each other and discussing their concerns and common problems but "we did not go through serious problems at the early stages of the displacement," argues Al-Flayti.

In fact, at the time of the project, the number of refugees was below 20,000 persons in Arsal. Today, it is absolutely impossible to claim that there are no problems in the town, but "at least the locals did not turn their back on the Syrians and have never raised their voice asking for border closure," says Al-Flayti.

The solidarity of Arsal's locals

"After offering us their houses, they gave us their lands," says Abu Fallah, a refugee from Yabroud. A woman from Arsal gave a large piece of land to Syrian refugees from Yabroud to set up tents when the clashes intensified and thousands of Syrians fled their city. Some of Yabroud's fortunate families who have now immigrated to Europe and the Gulf, collected money and assisted in building a campsite for their relatives on that land. "The assistance received from the United Nations does not make the poor rich," says Abu Fallah adding "the locals of Arsal know that very well."

As a result, the locals have generously offered lands which currently accommodate at least two-third of the Syrian refugees in 50 campsites according to Arsal's mayor who says "the town can no longer absorb the new refugees into its existing stock of housing, so we relied on setting up tents."

For those who know Arsal before the displacement, they will be surprised to see a town whose infrastructure cannot accommodate its own 40,000 residents, being able to suddenly welcome 130,000 Syrian refugees without exacerbating social tensions.

Due to the solidarity between Aرسال's locals and the Syrian refugees, humanitarian aid agencies and donors have to increase their responsibilities.

Employment was never an issue for Aرسال before the Syrian crisis. They worked in agriculture, quarries and sand mines whereas others worked in the transportation of precious Aرسال rocks



which decorate most houses in different

Lebanese regions. As a result of the Syrian inflow, the unemployment rate among Aرسال has risen quite considerably. In fact, the Syrian worker earns half of what they do. Moreover, Syrians ran businesses such as restaurants, and shops competing with locals. They also roam the streets of the town selling fruits and vegetables.

Even though the rents have tripled, the competition that the locals are facing is causing annoyance and frustration but no action has been taken whatsoever.

According to Khaled Al-Braydi who offered his land in the remote area of Aرسال, the locals complain about unemployment but "that is not a reason not to stand by the Syrian refugees."

In addition to the unemployment rate and the issues with the infrastructure, Aرسال's locals and the Syrian refugees are facing a health and environmental disaster with the beginning of the summer season. Everyone is aware that Aرسال has no proper sewage system. Flooding septic tanks are causing groundwater contamination. Around 50 campsites' sewage end up at the town of Aرسال causing bad smell and pulmonary and respiratory diseases among all. Unfortunately, authorities have not contained the problem yet nor have they found a long-term solution to it.

Despite the hardships both communities are going through, they have a strong partnership. Abdel-Aziz Al-Flayti, a local, explains that both communities are collaborating in construction, agricultural and business projects such as shops and restaurants.

The *mukhtar* of Aرسال Abdel Hamid Ezzedine says that 120,000 refugees have settled in the town and locals "have not expressed any negative feedback regarding their presence. We have in fact welcomed them and our stance has always been a humanitarian one first and foremost."

The locals explain that one out of nine pedestrians is a local citizen whereas the remaining are Syrian

refugees; one vehicle out of five belongs to locals, and the majority of cars have no plate numbers.

The Syrian crisis has affected Aarsal's social life as well. A study showed that 100 marriages were performed between locals and Syrian women. In fact, a month ago, 20 Syrian women were brides in comparison to two local brides. "The local men are even taking Syrian women as their first brides," complains a local woman.

On the other hand, Mohammad Al-Aalayli whose daughter married a local, responds that the kinship and marriages between Aarsalis and Syrians date back to history. "These marriages are not new to the region," he argues. He has erected his tent on Abou Rabih's land in Saf El-Hawa on the road leading to Kherbat Daoud on the borders with Qara. He explains that Abou Rabih was very generous as he not only offered him and his neighbor a piece of land on which to erect a tent, but also extended water pipes giving them an opportunity to grow vegetables to feed their families.

Al-Aalayli's nephew repaired an old mobile gas station to start a business in the remote areas of Aarsal "because many people pass by this area and need to fill up their tanks. He is now selling three tanks a day which lets him provide for his family and children," he says.

The granddaughter of Abu Rabih thought of helping the Syrians living in the remote area in her own way. She created a spot for Syrian children to meet so she could teach them how to read and write. "There are no schools in this area," says Amneh who finished high school and could not continue her education in university since her parents could not afford to send her to Zahle nor Beirut.

Aarsal did not only pay the price of welcoming Syrian refugees on social, economic, education, livelihood, and health aspects of life, but also on political grounds due to the ongoing political and sectarian divisions the country faces. Despite that, locals do not call for border closure but demand to put an end to illegal actions and rely on the Lebanese army's power to protect and secure the region with an aim to avoid any security flaws which could increase the town's isolation and suffering.

The Syrian displacement: economic advantages of a humanitarian crisis

By Bissan Tay

With the beginning of the year 2014, the number of Syrian refugees exceeded one million and with that, the disapproval and criticism pertaining to the continuous influx of refugees has remarkably increased.

In case there was a slight possibility to deny the demographic, social and political crises caused by the displacement and in times when the Lebanese political groups are divided over the current situation in Syria, it is difficult to deny the discriminatory and unwelcoming discourse against Syrian refugees promoting the Lebanese citizen as a victim of their presence in his country.

This racist discourse has overshadowed the scientific truth. In fact, the situation is not as bad as it is being displayed – not to undermine in any way the negative impact the displacement has had on the host communities – but it has also had positive effects, mainly on economy.

No detailed studies have been made in Lebanon regarding the economic impact and researchers are reluctant to tackle this subject, as it might have a repercussion on the discourse of the two rival Lebanese political blocs. As such, they prefer to discuss generalities or rather speak anonymously when doing so as "the accurate numbers are not at our disposal."

Also, no official statistics can be found regarding capitals transferred to Lebanon or the cash flow of Syrians being spent in Lebanon in particular. It is even more difficult to come across a study which specifies in which fields Syrians' money is being used. However, there is a general consensus about the amount having exceeded tens of millions of dollars.

In the beginning, the amount of 15 billion dollars was adopted as the number of Syrian deposits in Lebanese banks, which is an estimate figure due to the confidentiality banking law used by the banking sector in Lebanon. In fact, the banking sector is keen on applying the above as one of the major guarantees that allowed capitals to escape from nationalization policies in Arab countries in the fifties and sixties. Currently, the U.S. threats against Syria and the embargo against the country encouraged capital owners to smuggle their fortunes to the Lebanese banks which have earned the confidence of Syrians.

However, it is essential to remember that this issue has witnessed sensitive discussions in particular due to fears of Syrians using their accounts for money laundering. In this context, very firm measures have been put in place recently which complicates the ability of Syrians to open bank accounts. However, after deliberations between Lebanese bank owners and the central bank governor Riad Salameh, they came to a decision not to boycott all Syrian capitals especially that a large number of Syrian investors have sound businesses in Lebanon and are unrelated to the money laundry scheme, more known as financing terrorism. This advice was the basis on which bankers relied when accepting to open new Syrian deposits.

The second issue that contributed to the transfer of large funds to Lebanon can also be summarized in the field results of the current Syrian crisis and the misery it caused in a number of cities and suburbs.

The inability to commute easily due to the deteriorating security situation, the weakening of purchasing power and the depreciation of the exchange rate against Syrian lira have all prompted hundreds – if not more – of medium size business owners to relocate their stores to Lebanon. For instance, some Syrians not only relocated their restaurants to the Bekaa but also used the same name and decor as the original one they had established in Syria in an impressive manner. Also, sweets factories have been established throughout the country by less fortunate refugees with very modest budgets. They employ Syrians, who are obviously spending their salaries in Lebanon and buying their needs from Lebanese warehouses. Economists and civil society activists find it almost impossible to measure all the economic benefits from these businesses, as the establishment of many restaurants and small to medium size bakeries are taking place uncontrollably in many regions.

With the ongoing Syrian crisis and the influx of thousands currently living in tents or houses, unable to sustain themselves and afford their basic needs, the UNHCR began distributing an electronic voucher card (e-card) worth 44,000 Lebanese Liras to each refugee per month resulting in hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Liras being spent monthly in the country.

Moreover, several NGOs working with Syrian refugees are receiving funding from international donors and in fact, the funds are in constant increase due to the continuous influx of refugees into Lebanon. The funding received to date covers different fields of intervention such as development, education, culture, health and recreation. In other words, the funding offered to Lebanese NGOs has created a job market in different sectors. In addition to the UNHCR's e-card, the Ministry of Social Affairs and a number of organizations are distributing food and basic services to refugees which are coming from the international donations.

Some indicators do not affect positively the Lebanese economy in general but act as a double-edged sword benefiting some people such as apartment owners who are renting out their apartments and owners of infrastructural projects and construction sites. The demand for handy work increased and the daily pay decreased, due to the imbalance in supply and demand. Moreover, apartment owners have personally benefited largely from the high demand for shelter causing rent increases.

The final issue that should be stressed on is the political repercussions of the Syrian crisis and the deteriorating security in Lebanon, the crippling of businesses as well as the declining purchasing ability, otherwise known by economists as "desire to purchase".

In fact, some of these critical issues are the result of the Lebanese citizens' actions and the lack of governmental supervision on these different practices. The concern of the increase in rent is the perfect example which proves that the government is not performing well and has not put a ceiling on the rent increase. Also, another alarming concern is the replacement of Lebanese employees by Syrians, who are ready to earn lower salaries. Unfortunately, this phenomenon cannot be measured due to lack of governmental supervision and non-registration of these employees with the concerned authorities. No matter the number of employees fired and replaced by Syrians, the beneficiaries remain the Lebanese employers who are not prosecuted nor supervised by the authorities.

النزوح السوري: فوائد اقتصادية لأساسة إنسانية



انفوغرافي: تريبز يارد

The Lebanese drama revived by Syrians

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Lebanon was one the most prominent destinations for Syrian drama artists. It is undeniable that the Syrian drama industry attracted a large number of viewers from the Arab World making it earn an important spot on the region's map. In Lebanon, it was a different case as the drama industry was unable to compete with the Syrian one, not to mention that the production process was bound to the requirements of the few Lebanese television broadcasters.

The 'displacement' of the Syrian drama to Lebanon, Egypt and Dubai has benefited the Lebanese actors immensely. Suddenly, several acting spots were available for Lebanese to perform as main characters in series that received fame, despite some criticism regarding the standards of these productions in comparison to those before the crisis. However, if we put aside the discussion around the cultural, artistic and philosophical importance of these productions, we can notice that they have

benefited the Lebanese economy. In fact, more than five television series have been shot in Lebanon in one year only, some of them shot and produced entirely in the country such as Houdoud Shakika series and others like Sanaoud Baad Kalil mainly shot in the country of cedars.

The budget of any television series is estimated to be at least a couple of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some productions directed by Syrians have exceeded one million dollars, in which Lebanese artists and actors were featured. The budget was also spent on filming in certain locations, rental of equipment, hotels, houses, villas, and restaurants, and hiring Lebanese producers.

Here, it should be noted that any given TV series requires tens of employees to work for consecutive months, creating the need to rent locations to film, and hotels to stay at. As a matter of fact, in the series Houdoud Shakika, the village of Douma was suddenly revived due to the filming that took place in the village for a couple of months during winter. The employees resided in the village and rented houses which were used as filming studios and obviously bought their supplies and daily needs from the stores. But obviously the direct beneficiaries are the ones working in the profession. These productions also have an economic impact in a number of unexpected sectors. According to experienced production managers, almost one hundred thousand dollars are spent in these sectors in two months.

Those who follow cultural news in Lebanon will realize that old and new production companies are able to attract a number of famous Arab directors who have never worked in Lebanon before. Currently, the Tunisian director Shawqi Al-Majri is filming a series in Lebanon with the participation of actors from different nationalities, which has been made possible due to the Syrian cash being spent on Lebanese drama productions.

Syria, before the crisis, was receiving funds for productions from Arab Gulf states and attracting major directors such as Al-Majri, whereas now some of these funds are being spent in Lebanon. Syrian producers such as the late Adib Kheir played a major role in shifting these funds to Beirut through the series Ruby which allowed a number of Lebanese actors to perform under the management of a Syrian director. The actors have proven their ability to perform a certain genre satisfying the desire of donors by offering an imitation of Turkish production television series.

Hence, the Lebanese benefited from the experience of Syrians in the field of drama production, and from the sudden desire to imitate Turkish productions as well as from the ability of Syrians to provide different genres. All these have motivated some producers and donors to create higher quality Lebanese drama series.

It is useful to draw attention to the recent years when the Syrian voice-over of Turkish series spread. This voice-over in fact is precisely what allowed Turkish series to be screened on Arabic televisions. With the tensions increasing in Syria, the voice-over operations took place in Lebanon and Dubai, and were performed by second class Syrian actors and was of benefit to the Lebanese studios.

The Syrian drama production in Lebanon is an ongoing project which will continue with the prolongation of the Syrian war. It is an industry that generates a large amount of money only if the host country knows how to provide artists with logistical, technical and social opportunities. The discriminatory discourse stirs fears in capital owners and makes them feel that their presence, their

economic and cultural activities are undesirable, causing them to leave and head to countries which would welcome them and benefit from their works and capital.

Kin relations between Syrian and Lebanese families

Do they increase family bonds or topple them?

By Michel Hallak

The kin relations, which were and still are linking together the Lebanese and Syrian families on the bordering countries, are the main reason behind the large influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanese towns and villages.

With the ongoing clashes in Syria, hundreds of families living in the central cities and villages near the Jordanian and Turkish borders found refuge in these two bordering countries. However, the majority of Syrian clans went to Lebanon as they have extended families in the regions of Bekaa and Akkar, specifically in Wadi Khaled. Situated in northern Lebanon, both Lebanese and Syrian families resided in this village even before the outbreak of the Syrian war. Today, the Syrian community surpasses 30,000 refugees, a number equal to the Lebanese population residing there.

These family ties seem clear not to be limited to a certain sect nor a specific region, but are inclusive of all Lebanese sects due to descent and intermarriages which took place among previously unrelated families. Syrian and Lebanese young men and women who got married contributed in a way to the creation of a modern family and a new social fabric. In fact, kin relations can be found between the Lebanese and Syrian families specifically in the northern border villages and towns such as Al-Aridi, Al-Smaqiyeh, Heker Al-Dahri, Al Sheikh Ayyash, Abboudieh, Kashlak, Fraydis, Al-Debabiyeh, Nura, Mounjez, Rmeih, Shikhlar, Shadra, Mashta Hammoud, Mouqayleh and Mount Akroum.

The mayor of Wadi Khaled Nouredin Al-Ahmad points out that the unstable situation in Syria contributed to the large influx of refugees into Wadi Khaled and has imposed on families to strengthen the kinship ties between the two communities and even build new ones. In fact, in the past three years, a number of residents have tied the knot with unrelated Syrian ladies creating new family bonds.

He explains that he has hosted more than 50 Syrian families in his house who belong to seven families, some relatives while others new to Wadi Khaled. He also notes that more than 300 young men from Wadi Khaled and the neighboring villages and towns such as Mashta Hassan, Mashta Hammoud and the villages in Mount Akroum married Syrian refugees in the past three years.

This means that 300 new families were formed during the period of displacement, noting that this was a direct result of the prolonged crisis in Syria. "Life goes on despite the harsh living conditions we all go through, and our traditions and norms force us to commit to our customs," he says.

In fact, Al-Ahmad explains that Wadi Khaled has witnessed a remarkable change in its social realm since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The large number of refugees were received with pleasure and love regardless of the kin relationships. Unfortunately, this new demographic reality negatively affected the overall economic activities of Wadi Khaled's residents who are now facing unemployment because the Syrians are competing with them in the fields of agriculture and crafts. To an extent, this situation is causing tension between both communities. "We are looking forward to the end of the

Syrian war so the Syrian refugee community could return to its towns and villages. It's both Syrians and Lebanese' citizens wish," says the mayor.



*From the first moments of the Syrian refugee influx into Wadi Khaled, where relatives await
(credit: Michel Hallak)*

One of the elders in the village of Raj Issa in Wadi Khaled talks about the bitter moments the villagers, the refugees and the Lebanese population experience due to the Syrian unrest. He narrates how the residents of the village and the entire valley offered shelter to the refugees, and shared their lives, food and sufferings with their Syrian brothers who have been hosted for almost three years now.

He himself has opened his house to a Syrian family consisting of 19 persons who are still living there. "They have been residing here for almost 18 months and I have ensured on fully covering their expenses in addition to my own family consisting of 14 persons. Currently, a number of relief agencies began providing them with livelihood and financial assistance which barely last them for a period of ten days. My social status is similar to all the residents of Wadi Khaled and all Syrian refugees are well aware of that specially that we are related and share family ties with the Syrians," explains the elderly.

He further stresses that the kinship relations are very important to their community which has voluntarily hosted Syrian relatives and cousins stating "do relatives abandon each other?". The customs and traditions of these lower income tribal communities emphasize on hosting, assisting and protecting any family member in need, despite the difficulties they face to provide for their own families.

Around 2000 locals reside in the Lebanese village of Rajam Issa which is currently hosting 800 Syrian refugees. The population of this community hopes that the Lebanese authorities and the international community take into consideration their situation by enabling and supporting them in order to withstand the harsh living conditions and the potential negative repercussions the increase of refugee influx might cause in the region.

Khaled Al-Yasin from Al-Amayer, a village near the northern Lebanese border stresses that some of his fellow compatriots in Wadi Khaled hold the Lebanese nationality and others have the Syrian. Some of them in fact live in Wadi Khaled whereas the majority reside in Syrian cities, towns and villages.

The kin relations between Lebanese and Syrians residing near the borders of the two countries date back to centuries creating a one big family. This was apparent with the beginning of the Syrian turmoil which resulted in a large number of refugee spill-over to the region. As such, Wadi Khaled's residents opened their houses and hosted them due to family ties.

Khalida is one of those who welcomed her extended family. She is a housewife who takes care of her nine children and her two brothers' children who escaped from one of the Syrian villages in the suburbs of Talkalakh. "We are trying to cope with the situation despite the difficult living conditions. One of my sons got married to my niece and had a baby girl. You see, life goes on," she says explaining that they always look at the bright side of life. "That's what hope is," she says.

Her happiness revolves around her children and extended family who were lucky enough to flee the battles in Syria. Some of her family's neighbors entirely lost their houses and others did not even make it to safety. She explains that she is going through a difficult financial situation especially that her husband is ill. Her sons are earning little from working in agriculture and her nephews are receiving a small amount of assistance from relief agencies. "This is alleviating the burden I am carrying on my shoulders, but it is not enough. There are no work opportunities and our situation is worsening by the day," explains Khalida.

Another villager, Merhi Hassan has also welcomed families into his house. Three Syrian families composed of 21 persons and his uncle's children reside in his four-bedroom house. This sad reality can be seen in all the villages in the valley of Wadi Khaled, from Al-Awadeh, Al-Kaniseh, Bani Sakhr, Al-Hisheh, Al-Rameh and other towns in which 35,000 Lebanese resided three years ago, whereas today its inhabitants account for 70,000. In other words, 35,000 Syrians are currently living in Wadi Khaled. And the question remains: will there be negative repercussions on the kin relations between Syrians and Lebanese due to displacement or will they be strengthened? The answer will be determined in the coming days.

The smell of the distant Syria comes out of kitchens in Lebanon

By Lamia Sahili

Ala' did not want to showcase the machine she uses to make *kebbeh* until she cleaned, shined and installed it and put out the secret behind the Damascus-style *kebbeh* that she makes.

She held it dearly as she would hold her own child or her dowry when moving out from her parents house from Al-Qaba to Birzeh. The night she was displaced from her land, she grabbed the white machine and ran after her family members fleeing the shelling. "I left everything and just grabbed onto it. It is my source of livelihood. I used to prepare *kebbeh* for special occasions to support my family," she says.



This thin blond lady confidently explains the health benefits of the *kebbeh* with apricots, a dish she prepared in the kitchen of Caritas in Rmeil, south Lebanon, in the context of a project organized by the restaurant Tawlet Souk El-Tayeb in cooperation with UNHCR.

She explains the name behind the *kebbeh* with apricots to chef Abdo Al-Zein from Aleppo, who was nominated with other cooking experts to evaluate the participants' food: "The size of the *kebbeh* is as the size of an apricot and it is served with yogurt, chard, and beans which grow during the apricot season as well. This dish is seasonal because of its different ingredients and can be expensive for the less fortunate families."

Ala' is standing with her Syrian female colleagues who have memorized the date of their displacement from Syria. "My name is Hala, and on the 24th of this month, it will be a year having left Syria," she says while standing on the balcony next to her friend Safa' who is grilling *kebbeh* on a charcoal barbecue. Safa' imagining herself on the balcony of her house in Damascus, did not take the critiques of the chef lightly. "The *kebbeh*'s taste in Syria is different. If only he tasted the ones I used to make there, he would have given me a full grade. The pain of displacement might have changed its taste," she sighs.

Safa', Hala, Ala', Mahdiya, Nour El-Huda, Majida and the other ladies practice their cooking in a kitchen which is very different than their homes' in Edlib, Damascus, Kaboun, Harasta and Barza.

Sorrow, pain and memories from the past were apparent on their faces while they were kneading the raw *kebbeh* seasoning it with chilly paste and filling it with pistachio and lamb meat.

The participants, Syrian female refugees and Lebanese women, were attentively listening to the remarks the chef was giving regarding each and every dish they prepared. Some complained while others were filled with joy for having received full grades. After all, the training sessions aim at strengthening their Syrian cooking skills and "share experiences" with the Lebanese participants according to Majida who prepared grilled Lebanese-style *kebbeh*.

From behind her laptop and on the same table where seven different interpretations of *kebbeh* typical to Damascus, Aleppo and Edleb are presented, the project manager at Tawle restaurant Jihan Shahla, asks the participants to rate the dishes based on flavor and presentation. She also smiles and claps whenever a participant receives a full grade from the chef.

Shahla explains while attempting to calm down the ladies who are posing for a group photo, that the training sessions continue for three months and the current is the third in the context of this project. "The training started with a theoretical component on food safety, packaging and pricing," she says. At the end of the training series, the best dishes will be selected and featured on the Atayeb Zaman special menu of the Tawle restaurant in Beirut. Also, the best participants will be selected to cook at the restaurant. The ladies will also have a special spot in Souk El-Tayeb at Saifi Village where they will display their produce giving them an opportunity to attract clients every Saturday.

The participants cook Syrian sweets and traditional dishes such as the famous *basmshkat*, twice a week. Their favorite cooking day was today as they prepared the *kebbeh* which makes them feel at home. "This day reminds us of the nice gatherings and heavy meals we used to have," says Nour El Huda who was not intimidated by the chef's seriousness and began delivering verses from her poem: "They asked me what the *kebbeh* is, I told them it is a bite of love; cracked wheat, meat, onions, almonds we hide them inside the patty; piece by piece, bite by bite; God willing love will last so let's eat and knead *kebbeh*."



This lady who has fled with her family and her father's from Harasta, hopes to be selected to cook at the Tawle restaurant and in the market of Souk El-Tayeb "to lift up the suffering of my family and children and not have to endure humiliation at the doors of organizations."

On the other side of the table on which the different dishes were displayed, Hanan sat alone tears in her eyes and afraid to cry in order not to spoil the beautiful day her colleagues were having. She did not cook today. Despite the aim of the session

being recreational, and targeted at giving the participants hope and confidence in their ability to

produce, Hanan remained absentminded. When asked about what the session makes her feel, she began telling the story of her displacement and suffering, explaining that the Syrian crisis will not end any time soon.

Syria's flavor moves to Lebanon

Syria's face has changed.. This beautiful country that is rich in history is no longer the same. The war has succeeded in destroying most of it, and those who were able to escape, survived carrying pain and sorrow; and those who stayed have left their destiny in the hands of the combatants. However, the real face of Syria is imprinted in the few luggage of the Syrian refugees and the smell of their country is stuck on their dusty clothes from the long displacement. Syrians rescue their country from destruction each on his own way. Some through books, songs, poems and art exhibitions while others preserve it through cooking traditional dishes at restaurants that are opening in host countries such as Lebanon.

Abou El-Kheir for example is the owner of Beit El-Shami restaurant in Kaskas and has rescued his Syria by selling Syrian traditional dishes such as *al-ouzeh*, *kebbeh*, *berk*, *yanji*, and *yebrok*. He employs Syrian chefs to prepare these authentic dishes which are served mainly to Lebanese customers. Also, he markets his frozen products at the Souk El-Kheir store located in Karakol El-Druze region.

The same applies to Wassim Asfari, partner in Abou Wassim restaurant in Hamra street, who says that his primary aim is to serve Syrians and then Lebanese by preparing Syrian-style *shawarma*, and traditional dishes such as *sharhat* and *safiha*. He says that nostalgia drives Syrians to his restaurant which is unlike others since "we changed the concept of a *shawarma* restaurant from being a small kiosk with one skewer or two, to a real restaurant where the client can sit and enjoy his meal with no rush."

Ahmad one of the customers of the restaurant Habbat Misk in Hamra street emphasizes that his longing for Syrian traditional dishes drives him there. Also Firas, a refugee from Barzeh, says he asks the bakery owner near his house in Tallet El Khayat to make him a Syrian *mankooshe* using the special mixture his mom taught him to prepare.

However, Syrian restaurant owners in Lebanon are very lucky in comparison to their peers whose financial situation did not allow them to relocate their restaurants to Lebanon and are still waiting for the end of the crisis to return and inaugurate them once again.



An arms dealer's worst nightmare is peace (calligraphy by Yazan Halawani)

Peace building, the international community's responsibility as well

The Syrian crisis and its political and security repercussions have spilled over into the internally divided neighboring country, drifting Lebanon once again into chaos. More than a million Syrians found refuge in Lebanon, a number equivalent to the quarter of the residing Lebanese population, at a time when the younger generations are looking for employment or to obtain a foreign passport because of the frustration from the ongoing national crises as well as the state's incompetence in protecting its citizens and preserving their rights.

As usual, Lebanon bet again on the international community, not to solve its internal problems, but to assist it in carrying the burden of the Syrian case. As usual, it failed to succeed. This international community which converses about the Syrian crisis and its repercussions, is aware of the hazards that threaten Lebanon and Syria as a result of this crisis, and realizes that there are no barriers that would limit the spill over of the crisis into Lebanese territories. In fact, Lebanon has access to only one border and that is with Syria. This border is open for exchange, transport and commuting to Syria, in

peacetime, and it is also open for combatants, arms and weapon smuggling in wartime.

Moreover, both countries have a similar mosaic, and the majority of social and political forces in Lebanon stand and sympathize with this or that group in Syria; this country that is sunk in the midst of war.

The international community is aware of the economic risks of the Syrian displacement to Lebanon specifically the competition of Syrian skilled labor with the Lebanese labor. Also, it knows the weak potential of the Lebanese government in providing refuge for the displaced, in addition to food, medicine, and education. It is also well aware of the environmental and health hazards the large influx of refugees into all Lebanese territories can cause as well realizes the security risks this randomly spread presence can have.

The international community is aware of the Lebanese government's modest potential and that Lebanon is vulnerable to constant pressure from both internal and external forces, making it difficult for it to deal with the refugees present on its territory, or even endure the arrival of additional refugees, not even a few.

Moreover, the international community is conscious of the fact that most of the Syrian displaced are settling in poor regions whose residents share same sectarian affiliations and also suffer from a large number of problems on the local level.

It is impossible to pretend that the international community ignores the reality Lebanon is experiencing due to the accumulation of its internal crises along with the Syrian crisis and its repercussions, especially that the airport's runways are crowded with delegations of this community who are travelling back and forth. Despite repeated calls from various parties to provide serious assistance to the Lebanese government and share the burden with it, we see the international community leaving Lebanon to suffer and carry solely a burden it cannot handle. Here comes the role of the Lebanese people who are convinced of lending a hand to a neighbor in need, while the international community is aware that first and foremost it is its responsibility to bear the burden of both Syrian and Lebanese crises.

One person's will cannot build peace. Peace building is a collective will combining the forces of the Lebanese government, local and international community. However, in our case, Lebanon alone is enduring the adversity.

Rachif Derbas

Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs



The UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” project has been working since 2007 on enhancing mutual understanding and social cohesion in a participatory approach with youth, educators, media, NGOs, municipal council members, *mukhtars* and local leaders.

In response to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and in order to alleviate the growing tensions in the country, the project works on enhancing the capacities of different society groups from local leaders to educators, media and civil society, on crisis management, peace building and conflict resolution and supporting them develop mid to long term peace building strategies.

UNDP is the UN's global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

For more information

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