

THE LIBERATOR

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THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA: HOW WE CAN HELP

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Written by **Olivia Mizell**

The Syrian Refugee Crisis has been plastered across news outlets in the last couple of months. However, the media has been glossing over this solemn situation for four years. In 2011, a sector of the Arab Spring began anti-government demonstrations that quickly turned violent. In 2015, there have been approximately 220,000 killed, mainly civilians, and greater than 11 million people displaced. These refugees make dangerous, sometimes fatal, exoduses to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and across the Mediterranean Sea into Greece. More than half of these refugees are children who live in places with no sanitation or education. When these facts are laid out all at once, this crisis becomes even more heartbreaking. Here at UT Austin, we are lucky to have a The Syrian People Solidarity Group already formed to bring aid to Syrian people, beginning with a bake sale they had on September 18, 2015. Although this problem isn't happening on American soil, the Syrian People Solidarity Group hopes to motivate Austin citizens to aide in any way they can. Thankfully, I was able to talk to a representative of the Syrian People Solidarity Group to get a better insight on what they are doing and how the rest of the Austin community can get involved.

1. What was the inspiration of the bake sale & how will the Syrian People Solidarity Group use the proceeds?

The inspiration behind the bake sale was our group's frustration with the perceived inability that nothing can be done to really help Syrian refugees. We researched charitable organizations to which we could donate money and decided on Basmeh wa Zeitouneh, an organization operating in Lebanon and Turkey. In just three hours on campus we raised nearly \$1000 and that money will be directly donated to Basmeh wa Zeitouneh via their website.

2. How do you want to change the minds of UT students and the Austin community?

We want people to understand the sheer level of devastation that the Syrian people are experiencing (and have experienced since 2011) but especially that even here in Austin we can affect real change and help Syrians in concrete, tangible ways. Our group wants to challenge UT students and Austin community members to view Syria in a more nuanced way and discover how they can help like donating money to legitimate organizations doing meaningful work for refugees.

3. How can UT students become more informed about the crisis? How can we help?

UT students can follow our Facebook page (search: Syrian People Solidarity Group) to find out what upcoming events we will hold throughout the year such as film screenings, teach-ins, rallies, and future fundraising events like bake sales. Students can help by becoming involved in our group and help us plan, advertise, and carry out these events!

4. Are you working with any other organizations in Austin to help your cause?

In the spring we co-hosted a film screening with UT's Department of Middle Eastern Studies. This October we will lead a teach-in at Monkeywrench Books, which is a cooperatively owned bookshop. Members and supporters of our group are involved in other groups like the Palestine Solidarity Committee. We hope to make connections with other groups on campus interested in doing similar work and look forward to co-hosting future events with them.

5. What do you hope will come out of creating this group?

The Syrian People Solidarity Group was created in order to forge a space in which we could discuss and reflect upon the enormous tragedy that continues to unfold, and devise ways of addressing the suffering of the Syrian population. We hope to inspire UT students and Austin community members to become more informed about the crisis and make efforts to alleviate some of the pressure placed on refugees by donating to organizations that serve them.

There is so much we can do to help, even though this conflict is thousands of miles away from us. It is not fair that Syrian people leave a dangerous situation only to be thrown into the midst of another nightmare. People should not be drowning or dying in an attempt to achieve safety.

Click through to the Syrian People Solidarity Group's [Facebook page](#) for more information.

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This is a great blog i should say, I usually i don't post comments on many other blogs however would like to point out that this post truly compelled me to do so!

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