



INTERVIEW TO SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN IN CHATILA www.embroiderers-of-actuality.com

SOUND 1 :

I come from Kobane. When I was there, ISIS came to fight us. Women and children had to abandon the city because for ISIS we are infidels and that's why they will kill all of us.

PKK told us: women and young people that can take up arms can stay; everybody else has to leave the territory. For you, for your security, and for your honour, you have to leave. Everybody who is married and has children has to leave.

We left Kobane and we went to Jarablos. I have a son, he's 12 years old and he goes to school. On the way back home, people from ISIS took him and brought him to a mosque to teach him religion, how to perform prayer, about the faith, how to open, assemble, and take apart a machine gun, and standard weapons. I started to be afraid of what might happen to my child.

I have another child and he was sick. I took both my children and my papers, and went to the doctor. I was afraid, I knew that we had to go to Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. We just had to go away from Jarablos.

I explained very clearly to my son that what they told him is not religion. They say we are infidels but we are Kurdish and we are religious. We are Muslim, we believe, we pray, and still they say we are infidels. I escaped only with my two sons and my papers. I left everything there before ISIS recruits my children. Usually they take children with them for one or two months, so that they will pledge allegiance first and then fight with them. I went with my children to Menbej and after that to Beirut.

When we arrived here in Beirut, we didn't find anything at first. After a while we found a small flat and I started to work in embroidery. Thank god.

If you're here in Lebanon you have to pay \$200 if want to get a residency permit,. If you're registered at UNHCR you get \$19 per month per person. Men have to sign that they can't work and you have to provide a lot of papers, 200 papers! \$19 a month, what could you do with \$19 dollar per month? We need medicine, bread, water, education; and we have to pay the rent. We need all this! We came here but we are not happy. I don't want to stay here. As soon as bombs and the war stop, I want to go back home. If the war stops in my region, I would directly go home and I wouldn't stay one more minute here. Every woman here will tell you the same thing.

Jarablos is a city at the Turkish border. I lived there for a while and there are a lot of Egyptians, Tunisians and Moroccans with ISIS. One time a Moroccan man called Abdullah came to preach on religion, but I asked him why he didn't stay in his own country to preach religion. What does he want here? He told me to cover my face, but we wear a headscarf. In the Koran it's not written that women have to cover their faces.

One time I was on the street and I saw a tall Egyptian man stopping a woman with her three daughters, all dressed black. He told her that she had to cover her daughters and she said: "I swear, my daughters are already covered!" but he said, that's not true, that's a lie and took a white spray and coloured all the black women's dress in white, in front of all the people in the street. The woman screamed angrily: "What do you want here? Go back to Egypt. You, as an Egyptian, don't know what's happening in your country? Go back there and look for what happening in Egypt. All the dancers, bars, and all that is not correct! We Syrians are more Muslim than you Egyptians!"

Sometimes Syrians in miserable conditions need to sell their children to ISIS. We in Syria, we were good Muslims and as soon ISIS came men let their beards grow so that avoid problems with ISIS. They started to dress like Pakistanis, and everywhere you could see the flag of ISIS, which says "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria".

I will tell you a funny story. Once I had no water and no electricity, I looked for water in a street a little far away and I came back home with two buckets full of water. I didn't cover my face or my hands because if I hide my face I will fall., I brought water home and an ISIS car stopped in front of me. I heard a voice saying, "Decency! Cover your face!" and with so much rage I started to cry and screamed, "We don't have water, we don't have bread and all you say is just decency! Why should I cover myself? Don't you see that I'm bringing water?" He said, "The voice of a woman is like nakedness! Silence!" I replied asking him to give me his dress, so that I could cover myself because I have no dress. He was angry and the neighbours calmed the men of ISIS. They said I was angry because I had children and no money and no water and life was hard and that I'll cover myself. But how can I cover myself? I'll fall down!

SOUND 2:

Ask me a questions and I'll answer you.

I come from Damask and when clashes started we went to Der'a. Then clashes started in Der'a too and my husband disappeared along with my brother. So, alone with my children, I went back to Damask but my husband's family told me to come to Lebanon with them and I accepted, because if something happens to my children my husband's family will take care of them and pay their expenses because I have no money. My brother disappeared along with my husband, and my mother and father are dead. I have only three sisters, one is with her husband in Raqqa, the other is in Damask, and the third is in Jordan.

I cried a lot for my husband, and my children also suffer a lot from the loss. He was a normal man, he never joined the army and once on his way back home they just took him. Still till today I don't know where he is. It's now been 2 years and 7 months since he disappeared. I will never know, I even don't know if he's alive or dead.

We suffered a lot in Syria because we had to move several times from one place to another. We moved from Damask to Der'a, then from Der'a to the countryside of Der'a, then again back to Damask, and to Suweida after. We always were afraid of the free army and the official army.

A bomb destroyed my house, it was burned, and has been stolen...

We received official papers and we arrived to Lebanon regularly.

Here in Beirut it was also painful until we got our stability. My children are small and I have a lot of expenses and no money. I have a flat here but I can't pay all the rent and I have to ask for money. My husband was an employee in a factory and I never worked outside, only at home.

I cried too much at home and only when I came to the association I started to laugh again. I have to be strong for the children. I have three children. She's the youngest, Sally. I also have a daughter: she's 14 years old, and a boy who is 12 years old. He's sick and needs surgery and I don't have any money to pay for it.

SOUND 3:

I came from a small village named Deir al-Fardis in Hamah. When I first came here there weren't many checkpoints yet, it was easier. In our village there was no bombing. We came to Lebanon because our village was completely isolated and left alone, we had no gas, no bread, no electricity, no water, we had nothing. The official army was responsible for it. People of Houla started with problems and they let them spill into our village.

I came here with my husband and my children and I'm still very afraid because sometimes people disappear at the checkpoint or borders and we don't know where they are.

Two years ago we had our papers done and we came here. We're now at the beginning of the third year. For the moment we can't go back to Syria. If the war stops, we could go back, but we now have problems here with the Lebanese authorities. Once I'm registered by the UNO in Beirut, I can't return to Syria because I could never get the permission to come back to Lebanon after that, never again in my life. For our family it's ok, but for people living here it's very difficult, they can't even go visit their family.

My mother is dead but my father, my sister and my brother are all still in Syria. In Beirut there are only young people with their wives. The only contacts we have with the family in Syria are phone calls. Every person who still lives there tells us to stay in Lebanon, because the situation is absolutely unstable.

We went from Hama to Damask, and then came here by taxi (service). The road was very difficult because it took 18 hours of travel. Normally you can do the same journey in 4 hours. It was very exhausting, a lot of check points, and we were often frisked.

The truth is that we created the problem, we, the Syrian people, because before you do anything you have to think about the result, and we never thought that this result could be possible. When there's a region in peace, the Syrian people don't leave them at peace. For example, the neighbouring village of Houla didn't leave our village in peace. Instead they attacked Hararia and on the way back they allowed people to hide in our village, so the enemy thought that our village attacked.

We are worse than the official army. The road to Hamah was very easy before; we made it difficult and more complicated. We were in peace, Alawite and Sunni, but the people of our village killed an Alawite and that's why they blocked the entry of food and essential supplies, and they isolated us.

The people of Houla did all of this so that they can control the price of essential supplies. Previously we bought a gas bottle for 1'000 SYP and now they ask for 4'000 SYP. It's a business strategy.

No one in my family has died, but my brother who is a baker, was accused of killing someone. They killed a person and said that my brother was the one who did it. So now he's held in the village and can't go out.

That's my story.

SOUND 4:

I come from Homs, and I'm originally from Bab El-Sebaa. I came here to escape the war in Syria. They attacked children and we were very afraid. At the beginning I went to Rif Hama and I stayed there for 5 months until we were besieged. Then I escaped from there too and went to a small village named Chorf, near Homs. From there, we rented a small flat, but we had to escape soon after because we were besieged again. Some people said it was the official army and some said it was the free army. When we were besieged we had no access to food and essential supplies.

I have a 9-year-old daughter and two sons, who are 3 and 4 years old. We escaped to Lebanon two years and half ago, and thank god I'm now in Beirut with my family, but we suffered a lot.

My house was destroyed; I don't want to go back. I have no home now.

One time my husband was at the mosque and I was nursing my youngest child, and the soldiers broke the door down and came into our flat. The children started to cry and scream. They were searching for something and my children were terrified. Three days later I said to my husband, "Let's go, we need to leave this place."

My daughter still doesn't speak and she has a lot of skin problems. Every month we have to spend between 50'000 and 60'000 LBP for her medical treatment. I asked people how is possible that she got so sick? They told me that she is angry or in shock. She already missed 3 years of school. She should be in the third grade but she's only in the first grade.

Only my sister remains in Homs, but she has nothing left, because they stole everything.

My husband was dressmaker in a very well known fabric store, and also here he works as dressmaker, he earns \$450. We pay \$300 for the rent, but my husband smokes and we need also to pay the transport. Our situation is really very difficult.

We had a better life in Syria, the rent was cheaper and we didn't have any problems living there. I try to help at home but it's difficult. When I come to work at the association, I leave both my 3 and 4-year-old children alone, I close the door and go. What could I do? I have to do it. I can't do anything else.

I love my country and if the war stops I will go back. I love Homs and don't want to live anywhere else.

What they did in Syria is haram. It's not good. We lived well, we ate what we had and we were happy. We didn't think about the future, we lived happily day-by-day, and that was enough. I would like my children to have a better life than ours.

The revolution started in Der'a and people made a mistake when they went out.

My father had a three story house and one day when we were on our way back home they said, "Where are you going? Why didn't you fight with us? Now go!", and they took his home.

We want peace, we want a basket without grapes, and they didn't let us live.

SOUND 5:

I come from a small village close to Der'a. I came here to Beirut because there were clashes; our village was occupied by the free army. At first we heard that problems had erupted in the village nearby, but soon they also started in our village. We sought refuge in the next village, but they attacked us there too. We had to hide in a bunker all day, from the morning until the evening. Even when it was Ramadan, we also had to sleep there.

After that we received information, that all villages will be destroyed and burned. I didn't want to stay there, because all my family left, each one of us is in another country. Our home was at the entrance of the village, facing another village who fired rockets at us. If we turned on a light, they would send in a rocket, so I can't stay in the village and that's why I came here to Beirut in 2011.

In Beirut, I first lived with my husband's brother, then I moved eight times. First I lived in a room in Laylake, this quarter is only for people affiliated with a political movement, and they always harassed us, asking if we were with the free army or with official army, and who our father worked for. They really provoked us and they were going to assume the wrong position about us.

I moved often and the last room I rented was in Bir Hassan. I was pregnant there but my daughter was stillborn, so I didn't like this room, I couldn't stay there, and I moved again. After that, we rented another room with a kitchen for \$300 dollars, my husband earns \$450, so we only had \$150/month left, and that's not enough.

In the beginning when we arrived here, we thought we would stay 2 or 3 months and that we could go back. We thought it would be simple, but it's been three years now and we are still here. At first, we said it will end on the next month, then we said in one year, but now I don't believe it any more. I know it'll go on for a long time, but we would like to go back as soon as possible. I would like to go back home, today before tomorrow. I want to go back home.

SOUND 6:

I come from the city of Aleppo in Syria. I escaped the war when the air strikes started. I came with my 5 children and my husband. 9 months later I was here in Beirut. A friend of mine sent me images of my house, it was robbed, and after some time they sent me images showing that it was bombarded.

My mother and my sisters had fled to Turkey. My husband was tailor in Syria and I was a housewife. I was afraid for my little daughter's safety and I always escorted her to school. Our home was close to the airport, and there were different political factions. First it was the free army, then Jabhat Ansar (The Supporters of the religion Front), after that Al-Tawheed Brigade. I saw that all with my own eyes.

Before coming to Beirut I went to my aunt, at a village on the north of Aleppo. We had to live in a school, it was very cold, it was snowing, my children were very small, and we left the cold to go back home. We lived in our house for 23 days until it was partially bombed, and after that we decided to come to Beirut.

On January 17th 2013 we arrived in Beirut. During the trip the road was very cold, it was snowing and they stopped us. We had to wait all night in the car and they made us wait in the cold until the next day.

We've been illegal here for a year and a half now. When we first arrived, I was pregnant and I gave birth to my youngest daughter here. I can't register her because we all don't have papers and I can't go to the border of Syria to register her, since I only have hospital papers of her birth. I have a lawyer in Damask, and we tried to

register her in the family book but he couldn't. I can't go back to Syria, because if I go I wouldn't be able to come back to Beirut.

I don't think I can go back to Syria again. In the beginning I thought I would only stay here for two months but now I've been here for two years and 4 months. My house was destroyed and I don't think I can go back home. Here in Beirut, my flat is on the second floor, and I'm in a terrible situation. I have one room and a small bathroom for 5 children and myself. The bathroom is both my shower and my kitchen. I clean my things in the bathroom. I can't get used to the situation in Beirut, and my husband is sick of the situation here. Earlier we could live, but now we can't. We live day by day and it took me one year to find a job.

We were fine in Syria, but here there aren't any schools. My older children stay at home to take care of the youngest, and my trip to work is a long one, but we have to pay the rent.

I have no future.

Khalas, my future is over.

SOUND 7:

I came from the city of Deir ez-Zur. I arrived here in Beirut last Ramadan, our papers are out of date and we are unable to renew them.

They really crushed us, they ask for a guarantor. I really don't know where we could find one? How do you find a guarantor? Why would they do such a thing to us? Life as Syrian is already very hard, why make it more difficult? We don't have enough money to renew papers, and the rent is expensive here. It costs 400'000 LBP/Month (\$260). Sometimes we can't even pay it. We don't feel the help we get, I even don't know where the money goes. I came here with my daughter, she has a handicap, and she makes habka (hand stitching). We eat dirt and we don't know what to do with this life.

I have 2 children and they are still in Syria. Each one of them has 8 children of their own, but they can't join us because borders are closed. The house has been destroyed. Everything has been attacked. I swear, at Deir-ez Zur everything has been destroyed, ISIS and the others. I even don't know who they are. The aircrafts of ISIS attacked, the aircrafts of the state attacked. ISIS captures people and they slaughter them, as though they were sheep. In such circumstances we can't go back to Syria. We can't go back, and I always fear for my children are still there.

We are neutral. We're not with one political group or the other. We only want peace and there's no peace. Syrians are in an extremely difficult situation here in Lebanon. I work, but one month there's work and the other there isn't.

My children also work in a restaurant, they sometimes wash dishes. The situation is terrible, I swear. Anyway thank god.

SOUND 8:

I came from Aleppo, from a region called Al-Bab. We left the region because there were problems. My husband worked there, but ISIS persecuted him because he's a Syrian Kurdish. He had a simple life and didn't take part in any conflict or join a political group. Three years ago he came to Lebanon and I stayed in Syria with our children.

After he left, people from ISIS always came to me and asked where my husband was. One time they would tell me he's a terrorist with the state. Another time they'd say he was with PKK. In reality he's not with anyone, he's not affiliated with any group.

Every day they would come and ask after him. They threatened to take me hostage until he comes back, so I had to leave the country and join my husband in Beirut. I escaped with my children at 6 in the morning and I arrived to Damask, then my husband joined us there and we all went to Beirut together. A few days later I got news that ISIS occupied my home.

I don't know what nationality the ISIS people who live in my house are. They're not Syrians, they are dressed in a weird way, like Afghans. Now that they occupied my home, it's impossible to go back. This happened last year in 2013, and till now they're still in my house.

I came here officially with my children. Everything is regulated, and I am not with any political group, I am only with god.

My situation here is terrible, most of all because my third daughter is a new born (10 days old). Taking children to school is difficult. I have 6 children now, you've visited our home and saw how is the situation. My husband is sick, we live in two rooms, it's hard to pay the rent, and the house belongs to a Palestinian.

We are here in Chatila because it's the cheapest place in Beirut, but it's a dangerous place. There is sexual abuse, and there are a lot of drugs and alcoholics causing problems. My children have become aggressive and traumatized here.

I don't want to go back to my country, but if god helps us I would like to go away from here, to another country. I would like to go to Germany or the United States, because for me the most important thing is my children.

I want them to grow up in a better place and you saw how is the situation here. I don't have any family in Syria, they are all wanted from the system and they escaped to Turkey.

I just want to travel, it's my dream, and the dream of my children. Can you help me?

SOUND 9:

I am originally from Sudan and we were refugees in Der'a, in Syria since 22 years. My father, my mother, my brothers, we all escaped the war in Darfur, where I'm born. When the war started in Syria we escape in Lebanon and now it's 2 years I'm here in Chatila.

We had a farm in Syria and we lived from agriculture. The land we worked in in Syria wasn't ours. We bought it but under the name of a Syrian person, because we can't buy land unless we have residency papers, that we would have to renew each year.

We went from Der'a to AL Hajar in Damask. On the 7th of Ramadan 2013 we left Al Hajar to Lebanon. I live here in Beirut, in Chatila, with my brothers and my mother. We are 11 and live in one room.

I can't imagine the future, because it'll be worst than the present. Since I left Sudan, my life has been bad, bad, bad,...

We can't change anything, but thank god, fortunately, nobody in my family is dead. My brother was arrested for a year and as soon as he was released we all came here to Beirut.

We don't know who caused the war, there are a lot of groups. We lived the same thing in Sudan, and we are living it again in Syria. My message is just: "Stop, stop, stop all this war, it's an urgency, and people have to rest".

I don't want to go back to Syria, even if the war ends. I would like to go back to my country.

Syria was a paradise, but nothing will be the same. People need peace. The war must stop.

We were fine before, but now everyone is tired.

I don't know how it will end, only God knows. Only God knows.

SOUND 10:

I come from Syria, from Deir-ez Zur, from a quarter called Hawiqa, I escaped the war with my husband and my children.

Two missiles hit my house. We lived close to the suspension bridge crossing the Euphrates River. It was built during the French colonisation of Syria. It's an ancient bridge, a cultural heritage. The system destroyed the bridge, they attacked it with tanks and it collapsed into the Euphrates. This bridge also connected the city and the Rif.

I have a relationship to this bridge. We were born together, and we looked at it all the time, it's a part of the culture heritage. All students from the university had to pass over this bridge; it was a very important bridge.

The army of the system destroyed it in order to prevent the free army from coming into the city.

We could build it again, if we have the will, we don't need more, but it's impossible that the bridge will be the same as it was before. Everyone in the region painted it, and in every house you'll find that people have it as a souvenir. I have been in Lebanon since 2011.