

UNGA76 side event on "Raising the Bar: Working towards Comprehensive Justice for Syria"

Statement by Ms. Afraa Hashem

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me this chance to use my voice for my people.

My name is Afraa Hashem, forcibly displaced from the city of Aleppo and a mother of three children. I and my family were displaced in 2016 when my youngest daughter was three years old. We suffered from siege, starvation, and bombing. The most difficult days were the last days in Aleppo when the bombing intensified and was accompanied by the rapid fall of our areas into the hands of the regime. Here specifically, for the first time, as a woman, I felt very frightened. I did not want to be killed or arrested, as happened to me previously in September 2012. I did not want my fate to be the same as the fate of Dr. Rania al-Abbasi, who has been missing among the prisons of the Syrian regime, along with her six children, since March 2013.

I chose to live in my city because of my belief in the importance of humanitarian and civil work. I was in contact with the international media, trying to deliver appeals to save us, trying to instill hope in the hearts of my students. When the displacement campaigns began, I felt betrayed because despite all our appeals, we were not heard. It was unjust and yet still no justice has been achieved by holding all criminals and murderers accountable. To this day, I suffer from nightmares and trauma because of all the horror we lived through. The sound of planes, even civilian ones, still terrifies me, and the sound trains reminds me of the moment the barrels and missiles fell.

Dear attendees and followers,

The crime of forced displacement is one of the most horrific crimes against human beings in the current century. It was not our first nor last experience. The neighbourhoods of Homs preceded us, and Eastern Ghouta, Daraa, and the countryside of Hama followed us.

We are talking about justice today and "how it could be" while an entire people have been displaced from their homes because they demanded their freedom. Even now, while we are talking about justice, people are still suffering displacement as a result of the continuous bombing.

We are talking about justice today, and the prisons are still full of detainees, and we still have thousands of missing persons.

We are talking about justice today, but this did not protect us during the Russian and Syrian bombing of our cities and did not hold the criminals accountable.

We as women in particular suffer in silence, as many of us are still unable to share our experiences of detention for fear of the societal stigma that accompanies us as a result of being arrested, sexually harassed, or raped in prisons. We will not feel safe in this chaos, and therefore we will not reach justice at all.

Continuing violations and lack of accountability prevent justice from being served. We aspire to real justice by a political solution through ending the war, prosecuting all war criminals, releasing detainees, achieving a real change in the regime, and a peaceful, democratic transfer of power with international guarantees. Only then will the voluntary return of refugees and displaced people be guaranteed.

Dear friends and supporters:

Me, my family, and my people have certainty that justice is inevitable for us. And for the future generations that follow us. We will not lose hope for our real freedom. This is Syria, this is our legacy. We will not stop.

Thank you.