

2018

ANNUAL REPORT



**THE
SYRIA
CAMPAIGN**

SUPPORTING SYRIA'S HEROES IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY.

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Letter from the Executive Director

2018 was a particularly tough year for those of us who campaign for freedom and democracy in Syria. Yet the incredible groups and individuals we work with in the country meant there were very few moments when we felt despair. Looking back at all that has been achieved together over the year, our hope only increases.

With the Syrian conflict in its eighth year and much of the country inaccessible to independent international media, public and political support for Syria's peaceful activists has dropped to an all-time low. **Despite this, hundreds of thousands of people worldwide continue to support and stand with us in calling on the UN and world leaders to act to protect millions of civilians from their own government and growing extremism.**

We're in awe of the individuals who march with us, pick up the phone to embassies, give money and messages of support to Syrian organisations, and follow the latest news on the ground. It's their empathy, solidarity and generosity that keep us going.

As a Syrian who joined the first protests in 2011 calling for an end to oppression and abuse, I continue to believe in the amazing network of talented and visionary Syrians who now live scattered across the world or trapped in small pockets of our country. **I know that together we will build an alternative future for Syria** -- one campaign, media story, policy meeting, groundbreaking speech and humanitarian project at a time.

In November we lost our heroic partner and friend, Raed Fares, when he was assassinated by extremists in his beloved Kafranbel. His death was a heartbreaking loss for all of us who dream of a peaceful Syria, but his words continue to inspire us:

"The only way to create a new Syria is through civil society. There's no other way. It can't happen through weapons, it can't happen through realities that others are trying to impose. What will get us to the Syria we dream of is the collective power of civil society through their different work and visions."

This report is dedicated to Raed and to all the activists who have been killed standing up for what we all believe in.

Laila Kiki, Executive Director, The Syria Campaign



Photo credit: Daraya Media Centre.

Key accomplishments

Helping women campaign for change

In 2018, the 100,000 people who have been detained or disappeared since the start of the Syrian conflict finally became a central concern for international lawmakers involved in peace in Syria. This shift can be attributed in part to the Families for Freedom, a small group of incredible women who campaign for their loved ones who have been illegally arrested or disappeared by the Assad regime and extremist groups.

Exposing crimes against humanity

For months, residents of the Damascus suburb of Ghouta were forced down into the darkness of their basements to take shelter from the regime and Russian bombs that fell indiscriminately on their homes, hospitals and schools. We worked with those on the ground who were saving lives and calling out for help from the rubble to make sure their plight and stories travelled well beyond the siege of Ghouta to try to shake the world into action.

Supporting Syrian leaders

Northwest Syria is home to around 3 million civilians, human rights workers and humanitarians who refuse to give in to the regime's tactics or extremist pressure. When thousands took to the streets to call for freedom and democracy, we carried their pleas to the front pages of newspapers and decision-makers' desks.

Holding on to hope

The White Helmets, Syria's most famous frontline responders, continue to risk their lives to save others from bombed-out buildings and provide humanitarian help to millions of civilians. Their award-winning work allows them to bear witness to the war crimes that continue to be carried out by the Syrian government and shine a spotlight on the needs of Syrians in the northwest. In 2018 we continued to partner with The White Helmets to bring their story to the world and raise funds for their work.



Photo Credit: Sameer Al-Doumy

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

\$3,182,701
raised for Syria's heroes



TWO
Families for Freedom bus trips
to Paris and Berlin to call for
the release of Syria's detainees



MORE THAN 5,000
media stories on Syrian human rights
activists and humanitarian groups



50,660
campaigners took action



14
partners supported in their
campaigning and media work



34
meetings with Western politicians
along with our Syrian partners





1

CAMPAIGNING THROUGH CRISIS

Photo credit : Abdulmonam Eassa.

Campaigning Through Crisis

2018 started with one of the gravest tragedies of the Syrian crisis so far. In Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus that had already suffered four years of siege, people were cut off from aid and food supplies by the Assad regime. A short drive from the UN compound in Damascus, regime and Russian aircraft bombarded civilian buildings, battering homes, hospitals and schools over 100 times a day at the height of the offensive. People were forced down into their basements for safety with almost no access to food, water or medical care.

Close to 1,600 people were killed in Ghouta, including around 40 people who suffocated from chlorine gas in April. According to the US, UK and France, who struck Syrian military targets in retaliation, Assad was behind the unlawful attack.

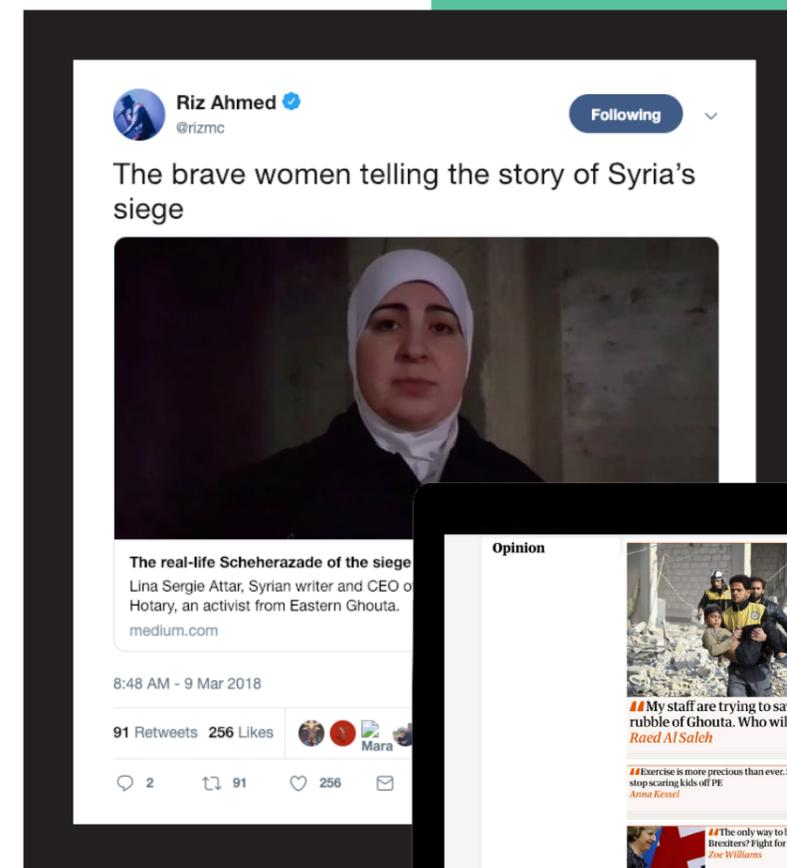
More than 17,000 of our supporters responded by calling on the UN Security Council to enforce a ceasefire, including high-profile supporters such as Riz Ahmed, Sacha Baron Cohen, Annie Lennox and Emma Thompson, while others picked up the phone to Russian embassies around the world to demand an end to their massacres. Others rang Mark Lowcock, the head of the UN's humanitarian aid operation, to urge him to defy the siege and deliver life-saving food and medicine to Ghouta's civilians.

Fifty-eight medical workers, rescue workers, civil society activists and residents of Eastern Ghouta also wrote to Mark Lowcock asking for immediate lifesaving help: **"Baby milk is in desperately short supply and disease is spreading fast. We have run out of ways to describe this horror but it is real and all we can do is ask for your help."**

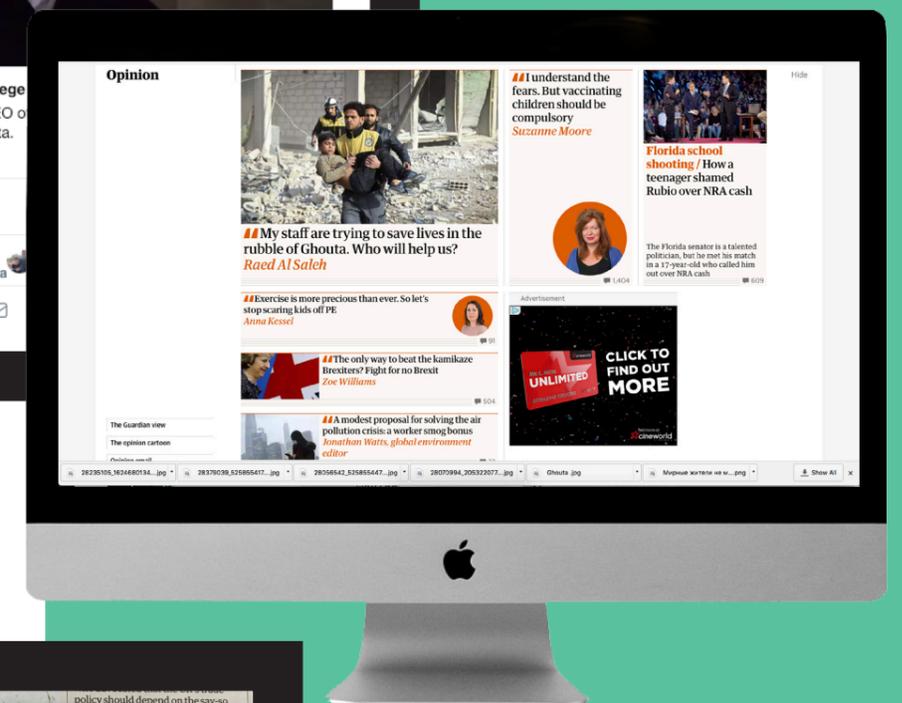
In addition to these calls and letters, we also shared the demands and stories of residents, humanitarians, activists and female leaders enduring the siege with the media and our followers.

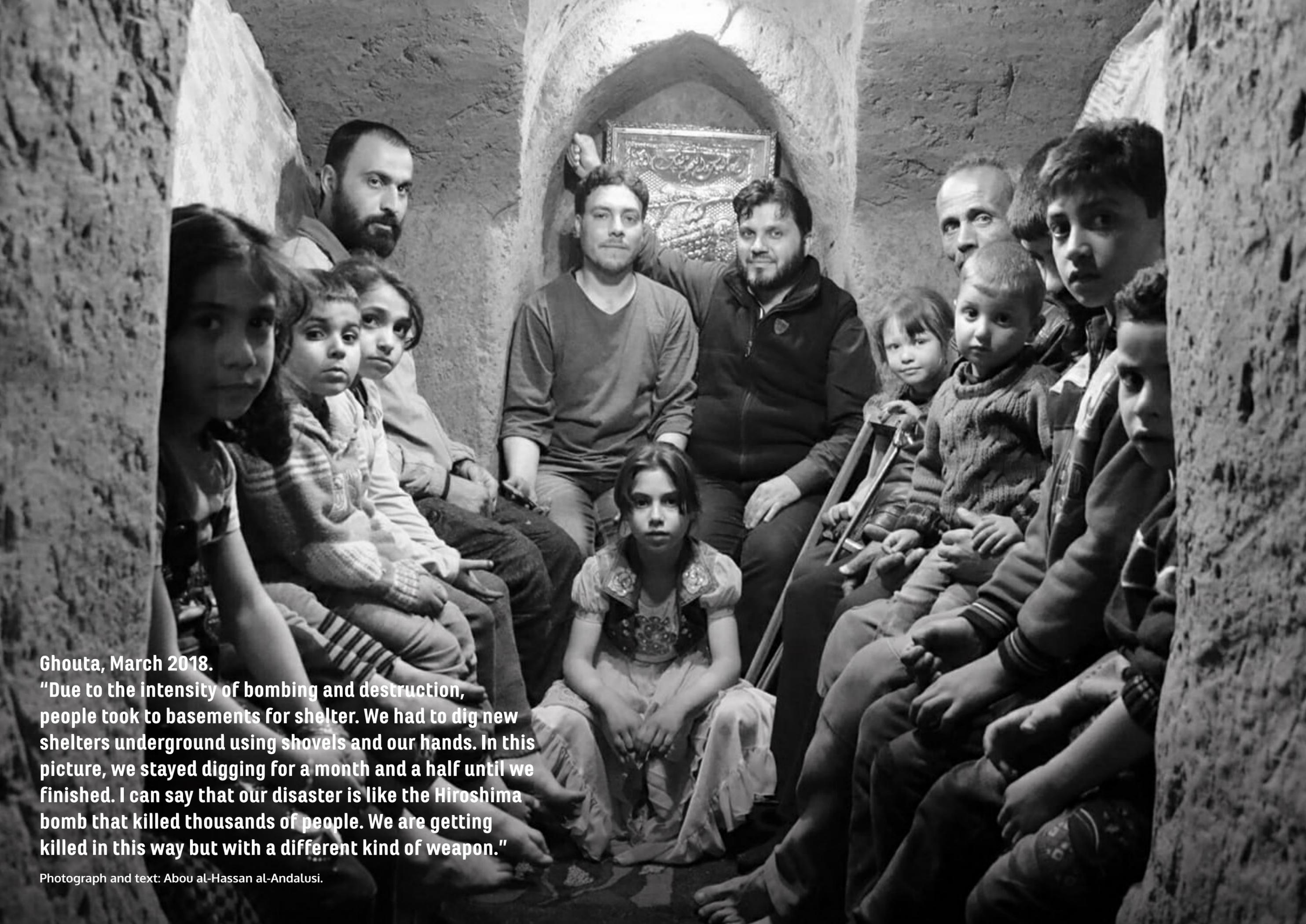
"When I want my voice to be heard as loud as possible, the first people I seek are the team at The Syria Campaign. They were my voice and that of a hundred others lately. They were with me during my siege and my displacement journey, and we still have many plans together for a better future."

Nivin Hotary, a Syrian activist displaced from Ghouta to rural Aleppo.



Ghouta, March 2018.





Ghouta, March 2018.

"Due to the intensity of bombing and destruction, people took to basements for shelter. We had to dig new shelters underground using shovels and our hands. In this picture, we stayed digging for a month and a half until we finished. I can say that our disaster is like the Hiroshima bomb that killed thousands of people. We are getting killed in this way but with a different kind of weapon."

Photograph and text: Abou al-Hassan al-Andalusi.



This is largest gathering
advocating the enforced
disappeared and detainees in
history . do you see us world ?

Maaret AL-Noman
28/9/2018

2

IDLIB
LIVES

Idlib Lives

When most of the world's attention was elsewhere, we partnered with grassroots groups in northwest Syria to tell the untold story of Idlib. Our Idlib Lives report, launched in May together with peacebuilding organisation Peace Direct, explored the work of civil society activists caught between Assad's airstrikes and extremist groups on the ground.

The report was shared with key influencers in the US government and UN along with non-governmental organisations and was covered by The Guardian and The Observer.

Throughout the year, we continued to connect Idlib's residents, human rights workers and humanitarians with international journalists, resulting in coverage on the BBC's Today programme, the Independent, CNN Arabic and BILD among other outlets. We launched a new website, Idlib Lives, dedicated to telling stories of daily life in northwest Syria.

Radio Fresh

Radio Fresh is a popular radio station in Idlib that investigates cases of injustice, holds authorities to account and warns the community of incoming aerial strikes. The Syria Campaign partnered with Radio Fresh to raise the profile of their work and that of civil society in Idlib more broadly. In July, we arranged for Radio Fresh's founder, the famous activist and journalist Raed Fares, to meet with senators and representatives in the US Congress to seek support for Idlib's human rights groups working to tackle extremism and protect the population from regime airstrikes. Raed met with both Democratic and Republican officials to push for greater support for civil society in Idlib.

We partnered with Radio Fresh to launch a crowdfunding campaign in August after cuts in international aid threatened to force it off air. Together, we raised more than \$40,000 for the brave reporters working on the ground in the northwest. When Raed and his fellow Radio Fresh journalist, Hamoud Jneed, were murdered by extremists in November, politicians, supporters and fellow journalists honoured his legacy with expressions of loss and respect, while donations flooded in to support Radio Fresh.

"Although I was heartbroken after the massacre that the regime and Russia committed in Urem al-Kubra in August 2018, I felt a glimmer of hope and strength when I was able to send a message to Angela Merkel to pressure Russia to save the 3 million civilians in the northwest. Please don't give up, keep up the great work because what you're doing is beyond words."

Mohamed Barakat, community centre manager, Kesh Malek.



"The Syria Campaign projected our message of freedom and nonviolence to a global audience, enabling us to get support for our work from ordinary people around the world. This was the first time we were able to engage such an audience and it came at a critical moment when Radio Fresh was at risk of being shut down due to US funding cuts. We might not have been able to get past this phase without the help of The Syria Campaign and its supporters."

Raed Fares, journalist, activist and founder of Radio Fresh.

Hurras

Our supporters donated \$31,447 for Hurras (The Syrian Network for Child Protection) to fund self-learning kits and mobile libraries for displaced children in Idlib. These kits and libraries allow children to catch up on education they've missed, in order to eventually go back to school and pass national exams. Hurras's work helps children learn to read, and provides them with the love and attention they need to recover from their trauma and thrive.

"The Syria Campaign focuses on the needs of civil society and has the flexibility to adapt according to the changes on the ground".

Layla Hasso, Hurras.



Raed Fares with US Senator Bob Menendez.



Hamoud Jneed and Raed Fares. Both were assassinated by extremists in November 2018.



3 THE WHITE HELMETS

The White Helmets

As the White Helmets saved lives from under the rubble of bombed out buildings in Syria, the head of the humanitarian organisation, **Raed Al Saleh, bore witness to his teams' work before decision-makers in Washington, D.C. and London.** He took the opportunity to advocate for an end to the bombing and called for international support for all of Syria's humanitarians and civil society groups.

When the White Helmets met with the then-national security adviser to the US government, HR McMaster, he responded by calling for US political action against Russia to prevent the continued war crimes against civilians.

In March, the US State Department hosted a screening of the award-winning documentary *The Last Men in Aleppo* in Washington, D.C. This screening was moderated by Heather Nauert, the then-spokeswoman for the US State Department, and was attended by dozens of diplomats from across many bureaus and also live-streamed to all US embassies around the world. The Syria Campaign was featured alongside the film's crew in a video that was published multiple times on the State Department's official social media channels, calling on the international community to uphold the UN ceasefire in Ghouta.

In September, Raed Al Saleh was joined by founders of the Families for Freedom at the United Nations General Assembly. Together, they called on member states to deliver justice for Syria.

In London in November, Raed met with the foreign secretary, the minister for the Middle East and other parliamentarians to warn that millions of people were at risk in Idlib if the ceasefire failed. **The BBC's Today programme and the Victoria Derbyshire show broadcast his calls, while the Telegraph and the Observer also covered the story.**

The White Helmets were invited to share their expertise at a number of international events. In November, Raed Al Saleh spoke at the Halifax International Security Forum. In the same month, The Syria Campaign and the White Helmets were headline speakers at the Economist's "The World in 2019 Gala Dinner" in Hong Kong.



Dr Hala Ghawi and Amina Khouliani from Families for Freedom, and Raed Al Saleh of the White Helmets, at the United Nations in New York in September.





Raham Darwish, a White Helmets volunteer, providing safety information about unexploded ordnance at a school in Al Jabal IDP camp, Idlib, in March 2018.

“The Syria Campaign has remained a loyal friend to the White Helmets, supporting us with advocacy efforts and showcasing our work on the international stage. They highlight the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis facing civilians, especially forcibly displaced persons.

Donations raised by The Syria Campaign have helped injured White Helmets and their families and allowed us to purchase ambulances. This work has earned them the utmost respect and recognition from the White Helmets volunteers and the Syrian people. You have never failed or abandoned us for a single moment.”

Raed Al Saleh, head of the White Helmets .



In March, The Syria Campaign and the producers of *The Last Men in Aleppo* met with the US State Department for a special screening of the film and to discuss the importance of the protection of civilians.



The McCain Institute Award for Courage and Leadership and the Elie Wiesel Award

The White Helmets' lifesaving work was recognised when they were awarded the McCain Institute's Award for Courage and Leadership in April. Two months later, the US government was persuaded to make an exception for the White Helmets' operations and reinstate their funding following a temporary freeze that had been imposed on civil society groups in Syria. This decision reflects how the international visibility and advocacy work of the White Helmets has helped build support for their work, even at a time when international donors have been cutting funds for civil society in Syria. The White Helmets have also continued to press for continued funding to other civil society groups in Syria.

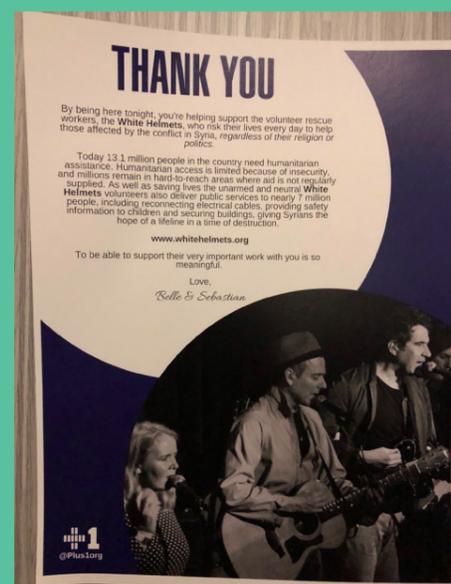
In October, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum announced that the White Helmets will be the 2019 recipients of the Elie Wiesel Award.

The award recognizes internationally prominent individuals or groups whose actions have advanced the Museum's vision of a world where people confront hatred, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity. The award will be given at a ceremony in April 2019.

In total, The Syria Campaign helped the White Helmets raise \$1,361,019 for their lifesaving and recovery work.

Belle and Sebastian

During their summer tour, Scottish band Belle and Sebastian supported the White Helmets by donating \$1 per ticket sold to the organisation's work, with support from the fundraising organisation PLUS1. The Syria Campaign met with the band to inform them about the work of the White Helmets and in June, the band paid tribute to the courage of the frontline responders at their New York concert.



Opinion Syria

My staff are trying to save lives in the rubble of Ghouta. Who will help us?

Raed Al Saleh

Thu 22 Feb 2018 11:36 GMT
 4,614

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been abandoned to starvation and bombing. How dare the world turn its face away



▲ 'In eastern Ghouta, nowhere is safe and there is no escape.' Photograph: AP

As Syrians, we have experienced death in so many more ways than we ever dared to imagine: we have been killed by barrel bombs, chemical weapons, starvation, drowning, torture, napalm and cluster munitions. This month, in eastern Ghouta, another encounter with death was added to the list: a mother's corpse dug from under the rubble by her own son, a White Helmet volunteer.



4 FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM

Photo credit: Simon Guillemain / Families for Freedom.

Families For Freedom

Detention and forced disappearance has torn apart the fabric of Syrian society and left tens of thousands of families separated from their loved ones without knowledge of where they are being held. **Families for Freedom is a women-led movement at the forefront of the campaign to release all of Syria's peaceful activists and humanitarians from Assad's brutal jails.**

Paris, Berlin and the UN

In 2018, we helped Families for Freedom go from strength to strength as their founders marched through the streets of Paris and Berlin, addressed world leaders and the United Nations General Assembly, and set up local chapters to bring families together in solidarity, support and campaigning.

The movement has become an icon of the struggle against detention, forming part of the US Holocaust

Memorial Museum's exhibition, Syria: Please Don't Forget Us and serving as key sources for politicians and decision-makers across the world, including the UK minister for the Middle East and the former UN Special Envoy on Syria. The Families' work has generated more than 100 international media stories.

In May, when the Assad regime began issuing death notices for hundreds of people it had detained, revealing that many died years ago, Families for Freedom members had to bear the tragic loss of their loved ones. Among the core leadership group, three of the 11 families received death certificates: Amina Khouliani, for her three brothers; Bayan Shurbaji, for her two brothers; and Noura Ghazi who received proof for what she had long known that her husband, Bassel Khartabil, a man responsible for helping open up the internet in Syria, was dead.

Their grief made them even more determined to speak out for freedom and justice for Syria's detainees and **their stories reverberated across the world with most of the international media covering the death notices news including the BBC, Le Figaro, NBC, the Washington Post, the Times, Channel 4 News, the Financial Times, France 24 and others.**

In January the group's Freedom Bus which is covered with the framed photos of Syria's disappeared and the Families' demands went to Paris where the Families met with the French ambassador for human rights and various human rights organisations. In the Place de la Republique, French-Syrian families called on the French government and European leadership to free Syria's detained and disappeared and improve the humanitarian conditions of detention centres where torture and starvation are rampant.

In September, the bus travelled to Berlin where members of the group met with a representative of Merkel's chancellery and marched to the Russian embassy carrying photos of Syria's disappeared. **Hundreds of people gathered in front of the Brandenburg Gate to remember the 100,000 Syrians who have been detained or disappeared and to call for an end to the impunity enjoyed by the Assad regime and other armed groups.** The sister of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest who was kidnapped by ISIS, stood alongside other members of the movement after joining Families for Freedom this year.

2018 ended with a new campaign calling on the UN security council to act. In 24 hours, more than 4,000 people across the world signed a petition demanding freedom for those in detention and justice for those who have been killed. The pressure only continues to grow.

In September, The Syria Campaign travelled with Families for Freedom to Berlin. Hundreds of people gathered in front of the Brandenburg Gate to remember the 100,000 Syrians who have been detained or disappeared .



Photo credit: Mohammed Abdullah-Artino.



Families for Freedom meet with Alistair Burt MP, the UK Minister of State for the Middle East.



Families for Freedom present their demands to Staffan de Mistura, the former UN Special Envoy on Syria.



"As we worked with you, we started to get to know more about you and your work. I saw that you are a very organised team with a lot of experience. It is very clear that you are interested in teamwork and team spirit. I trust the opinion of The Syria Campaign on any subject."

Bayan Shurbaji, a founder of Families for Freedom.



Campaign slogans projected onto the Russian embassy in Berlin.

**100,000
DISAPPEARED & TORTURED
BY ASSAD. RUSSIA:
WHERE ARE
SYRIA'S DISAPPEARED?**

WORLD CUP in Syria



5

SYRIA'S
SUPERFANS

Syria's Superfans

When the world was captivated by the World Cup in Russia, we partnered with the Oscar-nominated filmmakers, the Aleppo Media Centre (AMC) to highlight the war crimes being committed by the host nation in Syria. AMC made a series of films that revealed the untold story of northwest Syria where people struggle to try and live an ordinary life while enduring Assad and Russia's airstrikes and extremist pressure on the ground.

In addition to these more serious stories, AMC also dressed up as the World Cup mascots in order to film some lighter pieces for news outlets. They met with children in a displacement camp and offered a glimpse into the markets of Idlib for football fans around the world.

The stories were covered by the Guardian, the Independent, Newsweek, Viral Thread and Vice.



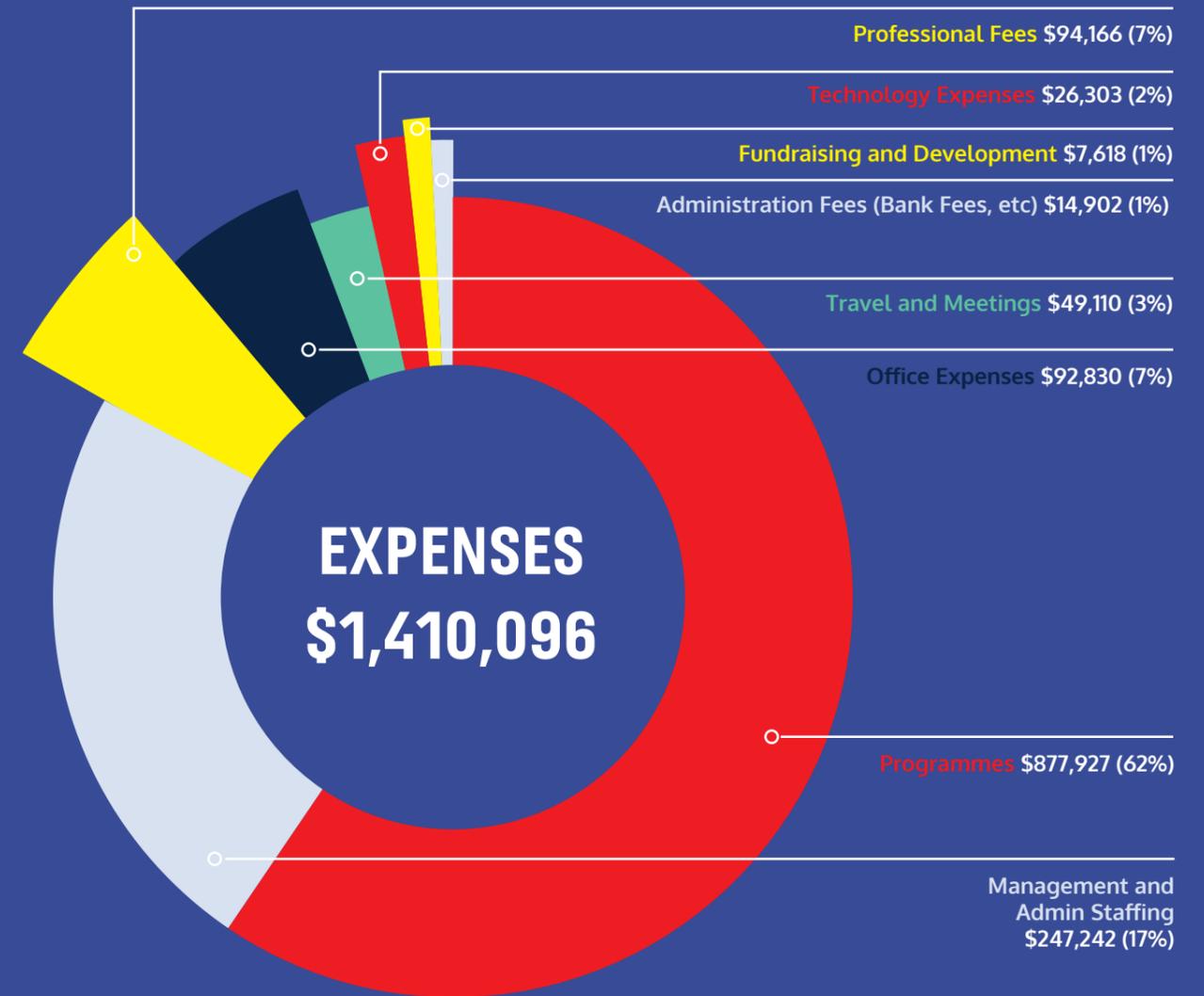
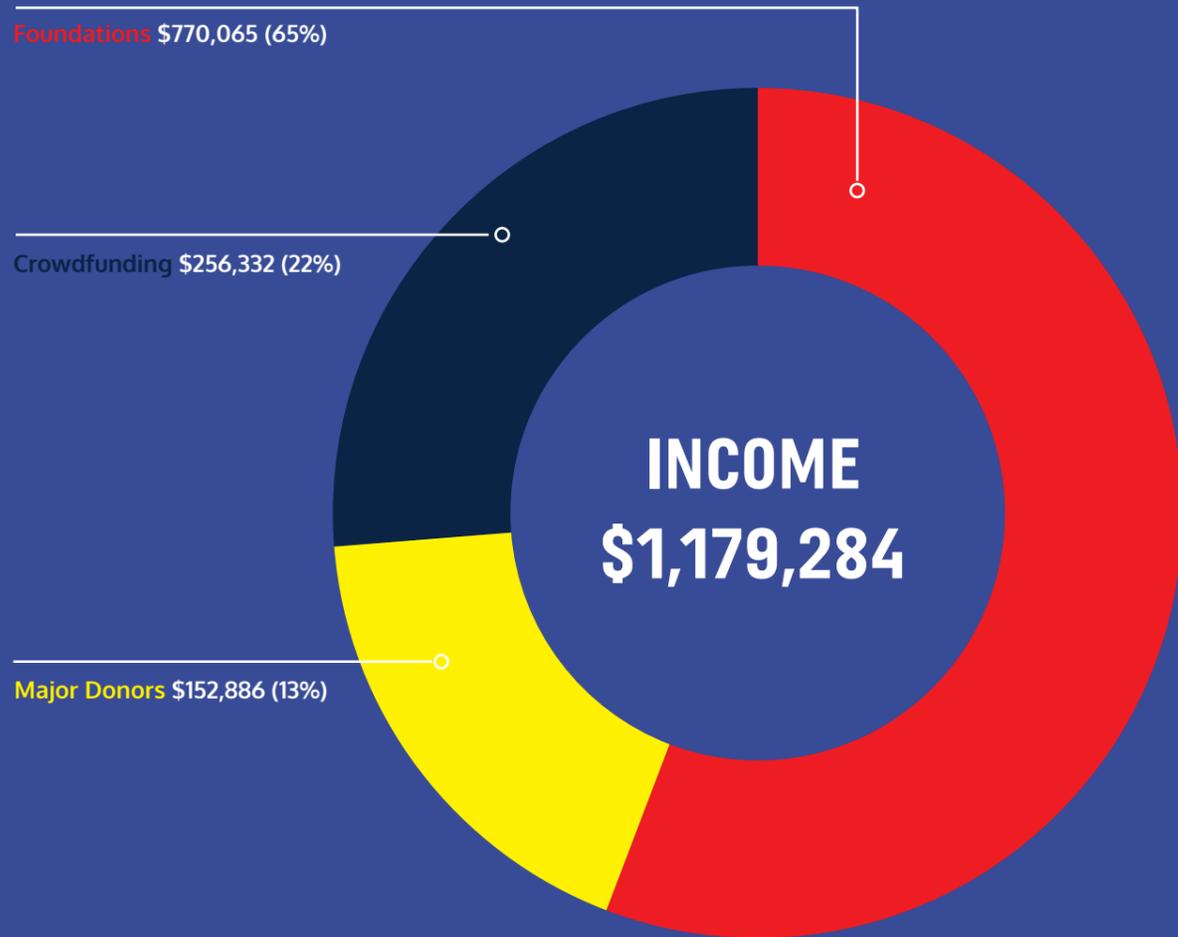
"We know we're working with creative and passionate humans aiming to support Syrians. I love the humanity of your work, how you advocate, fight propaganda and disinformation—it's vital for Syria."

Hassan Kattan, co-founder of the Aleppo Media Centre.

Financials

Donors

Asfari Foundation
 Oak Foundation Rockefeller Brothers Fund
 Ayman and Sawsan Asfari
 Anonymous
 Crowdfunding - supporter donations



The figures listed here are for the year 2018 and are pre-audit.

Thank You

Our thanks first go to the brave Syrian activists who we are proud to call our partners and who everyday continue the struggle for a better future for their country.

We thank each and every one of our supporters who have taken action for Syria. Every email, every phone call, every event, every march has been a way to stand with Syrians and inspires us to continue what we do.

We thank our board for their commitment, expertise and oversight and we thank the generous individuals and foundations who share our commitment to bringing freedom and democracy to Syria. Our work is not possible without your support and we sincerely thank you all.



Image credits: Mohammed Abdullah-Artino.



"The only way to create a new Syria is through civil society. There's no other way. It can't happen through weapons, it can't happen through realities that others are trying to impose. What will get us to the Syria we dream of is the collective power of civil society through their different work and visions."

Raed Fares, 1972 - 2018.