

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN, IMPACTS, AND WORLD'S RESPONSE TOWARDS SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

This chapter is about to explain three aspects. First, the origin of the Syrian civil wars as the trigger of Syrian refugee crisis; second, the spread of Syrian refugees to various countries all over the world; third, various responses from international organizations regarding their stances on the acceptance of Syrian refugees.

A. The Origin of Syrian Civil War

Syrian refugee crisis is the result of Syrian civil war. Due to many numbers of actors involved in this war, Syrian civil war has a quite high level of complexity to explain. That, in the other hand, makes this tragedy cannot be considered only as a regular domestic conflict, but rather as a domestic conflict with such a strong affiliation with international actors. The explanation of Syrian civil war below will be presented in a sequential presentation.

The pro-democracy protest suddenly turned into chaotic as Bashar's army started to demonstrate such a violent response towards the demonstrators all across the country. About 280 people were killed along the unrest that lasted for about six weeks (Marsh & Tisdal, 2011). The incident which was also part of the Arab spring pursued some demands over political freedom as well as the ending of corruption in Syria.

To scrutinize the motivation behind of the said demonstration it is necessary to know the overview of Bashar al-Assad's political behavior that eventually leads

to this point. Bashar succeeded his father, Hafiz al-Assad, to assume the office following his father's death in June, 2000. That made him the 19th president of Syria and the second in a row president from Syrian Baath Party. Among various religious and ethnic groups residing Syria, Assad's family comes from a minority-considered groups named the Alawite. This group is believed to account for about 12 percent of Syrian total population (Pipes, 1991).

Assad's regime's affiliation with the Alawit group is believed to be one of the triggering reasons of Syria today's condition. Eyal Zisser in "*Bashar Al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?*" explains the significance of the Alawit within Assad's regime. He describes that commanders of the Security Service, the army units, Syrian political bosses, and members of Baath Party are also part of the Alawit group. To that extent, Zisser also describes that aside from Bashar al-Assad's leadership that seems to have lack of experience and charisma, it was also considered too weak to break down the said affiliation within the office (Zisser, 2005).

That constant style of leadership has compromised Assad's vision to reform Syrian political trajectory. His presidency has later been challenged by the Syrian protesters who think that the country is getting way more distant from democracy. In brief, these protesters start to gain more people and form themselves as the Free Syrian Army whose stance is, of course, opposing Assad's government.

Free Syrian Army (FSA) is apparently not just a mundane opposition group which acts of opposition are manifested mostly through soft approaches. In fact, the FSA is founded upon more than a thousand of Syrian rebel groups with different scale of operations (BBC, 2013). From time to time, the FSA has been plenty of time caught in heavy military clashes with the Assad's army. Some that might be very

appealing to public are the clashes between the FSA and Assad's army in the city of Aleppo.

Within their struggles against Assad's government army, the FSA recognizes a problem on the side of coordination that is still lacking from one another. Departing from that, these rebel groups under the FSA umbrella eventually agree to unify their leadership body into one called the Supreme Joint Military Command Council or also known as the Supreme Military Command (SMC) on December 7, 2012 (O'Bagy, 2013).

The situation in Syrian even got worse when Assad's regime was reported to launch chemical weapon attack against the civilians. There are at least two reported incidents of the said-chemical weapon attack taking place in Idlib province on April 2014 and March 2015. Chlorine was confirmed by the United Nations to be the substance used by Bashar's regime within that attack (Ensor, 2016).

What makes the author called the Syrian civil war to have a strong affiliation with international actors is that because in this civil war there are allegedly many countries involved as either pro Assad's party or against Assad's party. Max Fisher in a video entitled "*Syria's war: Who is fighting and why*" visually illustrates the flow of financial and technical support from several countries. More into that, he visualizes the presence and involvement of Iran and Russia as two countries supporting the existence of Assad's regime. He stated that, "*...in the end of 2012 Iran is sending daily cargo flights and hundreds of officers on the ground.*" (Fisher, 2015)

In the other hand, the against Assad's regime countries are said by the video as the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf states. Except the U.S, those countries are

said to support the rebel groups through financial aids. Meanwhile the U.S is said to give support to the rebel groups through the CIA by training and equipping them (Fisher, 2015). In that sense, Syrian civil war has further become a proxy war.

Syria becomes an even more dangerous place to stay as in the middle of the civil war also emerges an extremist group calling themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) (Issa, 2016). Unlike the rebel groups, this group specifically aims to establish a caliphate state system in Syria and also in the states all across the world. The approach to its goal is often manifested in many violent ways. Beheading foreign journalists and terrorizing states overseas by bombing their public places are mainly the idea that they constantly galvanize to the world.

The rise of ISIS in the middle of that civil war increases the level of hostility in Syria. Thinking that ISIS is a serious threat to the world had U.S deployed a collective intervention led by the U.S in September 22, 2014 (Saul, 2014). Russia responded to this threat in a similar tone. In early October 2015, Russia finally deployed a military intervention to Syria after Putin's proposal was granted by the Russian parliament (Walker S. , 2015).

Regardless what other spreading rumors and some alternative theories have to explain on the actual American-led and Russian interventions' purpose in Syria, all of these countries involvement in the Syrian civil war have justified the level of insecurity that is very dangerous for the civilians to live in. Speaking on that sense, having the idea to flee is just very logical for everyone to do as everyone's life there is seriously at a stake.

B. The Distribution of Syrian Refugees

The Syrian civil war, in fact, is not only destructing the infrastructures for people to live in, but also the suprastructures where people mostly rely their life on the aspect such as economy and politics. That is to say that the escalation of the said civil war directly corresponds to the outbreak of Syrian refugees to various countries across the globe. Some countries inside of the region have become the main destinations for the refugees to flee. Not limited to that, a significant number of Syrian refugees has also been found in the countries that are way further than those inside the region.

Mentioned in the previous chapter is the fact that Turkey has been hosting for more than 2 million Syrian refugees ever since its first outbreak in 2011. To be more exact, the last data update by UNHCR on 7 November 2016 counted that there are actually 2.764.500 Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNHCR, 2016). That, at the same time, makes Turkey as the country to host the highest number of Syrian refugees in the region.

Speaking on the region itself, the data says there are 4.810.216 Syrian refugees distributed to several countries across the region involving Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, countries in North Africa, and Turkey. Those countries are currently responsible for hosting different amount of Syrian refugees in each territories.

Lebanon, for example, has the second highest number of Syrian refugees hosted in the region for about 1.017.433. Following that, the other 655.833 refugees are currently hosted in Jordan and 227.971 are in Iraq. Egypt, as the data shows,

happens to have the lowest number of Syrian refugees that are 115.204, when the rest of 29.275 Syrian refugees are hosted in the North Africa (UNHCR, 2016).

Outside the region, many of Syrian refugees have reached the countries in Europe as their destinations. The data that is collected by the UNHCR in Europe shows that there are currently 37 European countries involved in hosting the incoming wave of Syrian refugees to Europe which 28 of them happen to be the members of the European Union (UNHCR, 2016).

Data from the UNHCR also shows that Germany is observed to be the European country that accepts the highest number of Syrian asylum applications up to 449.770. The second highest is followed by Serbia which accepts up to 314.852. The other 413.292 from the total amount of 1.177.914 Syrian asylum applications are distributed to other European states ranging Iceland to Cyprus (UNHCR, 2016).

In Southeast Asia, Malaysia is reported to have welcomed 68 Syrian refugees of total 3000 that are promised to be resettled by the Malaysian government over the next three years (BBC, 2015). Meanwhile, the Philippines has stated that they are ready to take in Syrian refugees although it is still not clear on how many Syrian refugees are intended to be taken (The Philippine Star, 2015).

For the same reason, on September 2015, Australian government also planned to resettle 12.000 places for the Syrian refugees as a form of Australian humanitarian program. This is marked as an additional number to its humanitarian program which makes Australia to be responsible for 13.750 places for the financial year of 2015 - 2016 (Australian Government, n.d.).

In North America, the United States also shows some contribution in regards to the acceptance of Syrian refugees. Reported by CNN on 2015, there are 1.800

Syrian refugees admitted by the U.S government by October 1, 2014. The report extends that Obama has made an order to increase the number of acceptance for at least 10.000 in the next financial year (Martinez, 2015).

In that situation, it is necessary to know that the movement of Syrians from one place to another was not an easy story. In the process, as many of us may have known, there has been a lot of dramatic incidents happening in it. The problems that occur are mostly generated by the issue of limited acceptance in the destination countries which is not linear with the exponential growth of the Syrian refugee itself.

The issue in resettlement capacity and process leave the Syrian refugees with no option but to become illegal refugees. The term of ‘illegal’ mentioned in this writing is to express the Syrian refugees that come across the national border without going through any constituted measures. Mediterranean Sea is known to be the most popular route for the Syrian refugees to get into the European countries. However, this route is also known to be very dangerous. The Telegraph reported that in 2015 there have been more than 2.500 people died in their attempt to go crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Quoted from the same source (Squires, 2016), it also said that,

“That number represents a significant increase compared with the same period last year, when 1,855 migrants lost their lives after their boats capsized and sank. In 2014, the figure for the same period was just 57.”

The other impact from the overwhelming number of Syrian refugees is the occurrence of the refugee’s smugglers. Reported by the Guardian in May 2016, Italian navy had forcibly sunk a trawler filled up with around 550 refugees after it was caught crossing the southern Mediterranean Sea to enter Italian territory. It was

fortunate that in that incident, Italian navy successfully managed to save almost all of the refugees (Kingsley, 2016).

In the same issue, Greece also happens to experience the same problem as one of the entry points to the European mainland. It is observed that Syrian refugees who already arrived in Greece start to feel desperate as the Macedonian border (a border that connects to the western part of Europe) is closed (Aljazeera, 2016). The fear of not being able to be resettled in the western European countries leads the refugees to take risky measure by paying the smugglers to get them crossing off the border.

C. International Responses on Syrian Refugee Crisis

Syrian refugee crisis has invited many international responses ranging from international governmental organization (IGO) until the international non-governmental organizations (INGO). In regards to this particular tragedy, those responses are specifically addressed for the possibility of solutions that can be implemented to the current conditions of the Syrian refugee outbreak.

The following explanations are derived from the actions, recommendations, and solutions given by the said actors whose capacity are clearly diversified according to their role and either IGO or INGO. Thus, there are 4 different responses to be discussed, they are first, Amnesty International; second, the United Nations; third, the European Union; fourth, Organization of Islamic Conference.

1. The United Nations

When it comes to the issue of Syrian refugee crisis, the United Nations seems to hold a quite big portion within the discussion. As a fact, for this specific

range of field, the UN has established a special commission called the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (often abbreviated as UNHCR).

Speaking on the form of response it has shown, the UNHCR is often referred as the main platform for almost every other organizations and/or humanitarian aid movements to work with. However, ever since the escalation of the Syrian civil war happened (even before the Syrian civil war exists) there has been plenty of conferences conducted by the higher board of the organization such as the UN Security Council resulting various resolutions regarding the condition in Syria.

Take for an example the resolution number 2254 that was adopted by the UN Security Council in 2015. A resolution that sets in focus on endorsing road map for peace process in Syria, also apparently manages to urge the UN member states to participate in providing the necessary assistance regarding the issue. Stated in the point number 14th of the resolution,

“Underscores the critical need to build conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their home areas and the rehabilitation of affected areas, in accordance with international law, including applicable provisions of the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, and taking into account the interests of those countries hosting refugees, urges Member States to provide assistance in this regard, looks forward to the London Conference on Syria in February 2016, hosted by the United Kingdom, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations, as an important contribution to this endeavour, and further expresses its support to the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of Syria (United Nations Security Council, 2015);”

Putting it into the recent practice, the UN, through UNHCR, says to have been contributing on providing the basic needs needed by the Syrian refugees such as food, medicine, clothes, and else. UNHCR also sets the Regional

Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in order to help the funding for the countries that have received the Syrian refugees and are located in the same region. Not to mention, the 3RP's 2015 annual report says that they have successfully collected USD 4.32 billion through the inter-agency program (UNHCR 3RP, 2015).

2. The European Union

As an international organization (or to be more exact, supranational) the European Union, too, has its own way in responding and doing its efforts towards the Syrian refugee crisis. Following some of the facts that have been mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, we have known that the European land is one of the most popular destinations for the Syrian refugees to come to. By speaking on that sense, we need to also know that almost all policies made in regards to that particular problem and which have been also affecting the decision in the European countries are under the management of the European Union.

Mentioned in a research report written by the Migration Policy Centre in 2012 (Fargues & Fandrich, *The European Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: What Next?*, MPC RR 2012/14, 2012), the EU was said to have provided around €230 million for the purpose of humanitarian assistance and other necessary needs of the Syrian refugees. That is to say that, as a supranational organization, the EU has taken the option of using financial aid as one of their effort of tackling the Syrian refugee issue.

The other measure taken by the EU besides contributing through funding the humanitarian aid for the Syrian refugees is also by suspending the cooperation it has with the government of Syria (European Union Strategic

Communication, 2014). This suspension has been gradually developed into a restrictive measures (similar to sanctions) such as embargo on goods that can be further used for internal repression, and many others (European Commission, 2016). This decision can be taken as an example of firm response to the Syrian government for such a horrible humanitarian condition in Syria.

3. Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

This organization also has been showing its response towards the said tragedy. As an organizations whose members consist of countries with large Muslim population (if not a total Muslim countries), OIC acts through numbers of strong advocacies and conferences in order to manifest its actions and concerns towards the growing number of Syrian refugees.

A summit called the 13th Islamic Summit of the Heads of State/Government of the OIC Member States that was conducted on April 15th, 2016 had succeed to make a final communique as an output. In particular, some of the points written in that final communique address the OIC's view and concern on the Syrian refugee crisis. As one of the examples, mentioned in the point number 54 of the communique,

“The Conference called on the international community and OIC Member States to support Syrian refugees and countries hosting them as soon as possible, and to develop resettlement programmes for Syrian refugees in order to alleviate their plights and that of the hosting States (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2016).”

In particular, the OIC also manages to conduct a Permanent Representatives meeting to talk about the deteriorating situation in Syria,

especially in the city of Aleppo. The meeting which took place on October 9th, 2016, also happens to result an output called the final communique. Most of the points articulated within the output address the OIC's condemnation towards the ruling regime in Syria who starts using many kinds of heavy materials, especially the use of chemical weapon in the city of Aleppo. At the end of point number 4 of the final communique stated that, "*...the Syrian regime must be held accountable and the Russian Federation and other states supporting the regime must be held responsible for the continuation of these violations* (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2016)."

In extending its effort on this issue, the OIC also urges the implementation of several United Nations Security Council resolutions that are believed to be potentially significant to stop the overwhelming impact of the Syrian war. This is mentioned in point number 9 of the final communique,

"The meeting called for the implementation of Security Council Resolutions in particular resolutions 2254 and 2268 in order to reinstate the cessation of hostilities in all parts of Syria, and resolutions 2139 and 2191 on the provision of unhindered humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians. It urged Member States and the Humanitarian Department at the General Secretariat as well as civil society organizations active in the humanitarian field, to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to all Syrian refugees and displaced persons and to the countries hosting refugees. (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2016)"

4. Amnesty International

Among many international organizations involved in the effort of handling the outbreak of Syrian refugees, Amnesty International (a non-profit non-governmental organization) also takes part in this issue. The name of this

particular NGO is often heard through its campaigns and advocacies that cover almost every issues related to human rights.

In the context of Syrian refugee crisis, the author believes that Amnesty International holds a quiet important role as one of the international NGOs which campaigns and researches have been quite vocal in addressing the said-issue. The way it works its objectives is basically through three steps; research, advocacy and lobbying, campaign and action. In its research entitled "*An International Failure: The Syrian Refugee Crisis*" Amnesty international mentioned several recommendations based on their own research to which are addressed mostly to the governments all around the world (Amnesty International, 2013).

The other thing that Amnesty International do as an NGO to stop the Syrian refugee crisis is by launching several campaigns related to the issue of Syrian refugees. One that becomes the central attention among all things that we have talked about is the rejection towards the incoming Syrian refugees in the U.S. Having that situation occurred, in the fall 2016 it launched a campaign called a global campaign for the protection of refugee and migrants' rights (RMR) (Amnesty International USA, 2015).

It is indeed, the involvement of many other countries and international organizations in the effort of handling the constantly increasing number of Syrian refugees has been significant, measuring from the programs, policies, and funding they have provided for it. However, this does not close the possibility that there are still some controversies happening in the process which

may clash with the idea of humanitarian ethics and other normative responses we would usually hear.

Acting as the main actor on this undergraduate thesis title, Canada, in the author's perspective, has been showing a worth-explaining response. What becomes the basic of that statement and how (in brief) Canada has been supportively dealing with the issue of Syrian refugee crisis has been explained in the previous chapter. The next chapter will elaborate more on the particular case of Canada's social construction towards the refugees.