

First, there was the Word. And the Word begat stories:

... Once upon a time... there was, there is, the Syrian people, living in a country called Syria. Syria, which leans towards the rising sun, is located in the heart of the Mediterranean. Here, where the first alphabet came to be, the rhythm of the Syrian civilization is a mosaic of the languages, religions and nationalities that have passed through and settled, making a life for themselves in its geography and its history.

Syria has opened its doors after forty-five years of tyranny under one party and one ruler. The Word frees itself from silence, the sadness of multiple meanings spreads and its blood flows.

In March 2011, millions of young men and women walked through their front doors and flooded into the streets of the nation to stage peaceful protests: they cried out the wish that had long been dormant and was now awaking in their hearts: the wish for Freedom.

Unarmed, their only weapon was the word, and they remain unarmed to this day.

The security regime responded with fire, bullets, canons, missiles, tanks and bombers.

The regime sent bombers who dropped barrel bombs... They sent lethal chemical gasses while they slept. Among them, two hundred thousand Syrian citizens have been killed, two hundred thousand have been arrested and a hundred thousand have

“disappeared,” probably dying under torture. Eight million people have been displaced both inside and outside the country’s borders. Those who have managed to survive live to tell the tale.

Once upon a time:

The regime called on its allies, such as Russia, the defender of despotism, and Iran, led by a theocratic government (Wilayat Al-Faqih). It was further protected by the silence of other nations when faced with the carnage, as though Syria did not even belong to this world!

Because of the “security solution” it adopted to suppress the revolution, the regime attracted Islamic extremists, such as al-Qaeda and others, and released some of them from its prisons, specifically to convince the civilized world that it was trying to defeat the monsters of terrorism. The two sides joined together, to serve their respective interests, in order to destroy the life of Syrians and to silence the voice of Freedom. The democratic world continues to be silent in the face of this carnage.

The very soul of our revolution is being stripped bare, but we are determined to persist for as long as we have the breath to tell our tales.

Syrians have continued the peaceful revolution, through creative expression, photography, cinema, poetry, novels, song, music, art, theatre and thought... They have supported the culture of life when confronted with the culture of death, which is a giant

eraser; a giant eraser rubbing out all traces of life, as though the Syrians who have been killed, arrested, displaced... never even existed.

Each time the revolution's pacifism has risen up, calling for the unity of the Syrian people and for a Democratic State that recognized equal rights and dignities for each and every citizen, social justice, and a non-theocratic and non-militarized civil State that adheres to the nature of co-existence woven into the very fabric of Syrian society, the regime's violence and savagery have increased, plunging Syrians into the dark hole of a war they have resisted and rued... A war that "violates" their life and into which they have been thrown despite themselves... they have burned and continue to be burned in the raging inferno of this war.

The regime has dragged people and the army into a war... in which Syria and Syrians are the losers. The regime has re-awakened the religiosity that had been slumbering within the national union, the precious national union, our civil treasure, celebrated in the streets of the country since the dawn of our history and since the very first moment of the revolution: "one, one, one... the Syrian people are one."

And: "Stop the massacre. We want to build a homeland for all Syrians."

The regime's media outlets have relied on the increasing strength of extremist groups

that have started to sprout like mushrooms. In fact, these groups are entering our country fully equipped for war and with considerable financial backing, guaranteed by various Arab and international organizations. They occupy inhabited areas whose people share their habits and customs, enforcing despotic rule that feeds on notions of the religious sacred. This is how the people have fallen between a rock—the military—and a hard place—religion.

The protests in our country have called on the democratic world, and our chants have been addressed to you. The Syrians are at a loss to comprehend how this world could erase, day after day, our daily stories of death shared in its newspapers and news updates and literature. How was the world's gaze not drawn to the windows of our houses—these Syrian houses, inhabited by courage, dignity and peace—thrown wide open by the power of freedom and the power of love?

Once upon a time... is now...

The blockade.

A people who want to live with dignity and who wish for the prisoners of conscience lost in the bowels of the regime's jails and held by Islamist extremists to be set free. A people who wish for the refugees, the exiles and the displaced to return home. A people who wish to banish the occupying religious and military despots.

Free men, free women of this world, cry out in the face of this silence in which Syria is being swallowed each and every day... Today, right now.

End this silence, which is suffocating Syria, a country besieged by famine, drought and humiliation... As though the entire world were colluding against us.

Cry out to demand that the carnage end! Cry out with us, so that justice emerges from its slumber.

We believe in the power of free speech.

Cry out so that Syria can continue its story in the moonlight.

Cry out so that you can continue our story with us.

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Hala Mohammad, Syrian poet

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