

# THE WHITE HELMETS: BRIEFING

THIS PAGE CONTAINS BRIEFING MATERIALS INCLUDING: LINKS TO CONTENT, FACTS AND FIGURES, AND QUOTES FROM RAED AL SALEH, HEAD OF THE WHITE HELMETS.

For images and video visit: <http://bit.ly/whitehelmetscontent>

The Syria Civil Defence (also known as the White Helmets) is an organisation of volunteer rescue workers operating across Syria. They are made up of volunteers from all walks of life: tailors, carpenters, builders, doctors and university students. When attacks take place, the White Helmets are often the first responders at the scene. Their search and rescue teams dig people out from under the rubble and drive them to safety. The White Helmets provide services such as alerting people to unexploded bombs and finding homes for internally displaced people. However they are most known for their iconic search and rescue work.

To contact the Syria Civil Defence, email [info@syriacivildefence.org](mailto:info@syriacivildefence.org). For background and further comment, email [media@thesyriacampaign.org](mailto:media@thesyriacampaign.org)

## Facts and figures

- The White Helmets are made up of just under 3,000 volunteers across Syria.
- The group has been operating since 2013, when groups of Syrian volunteers first got together to search for people trapped under the rubble after bombs and airstrikes.
- Their motto is “To save one life is to save all of humanity”. It is derived from the Quran.
- Approximately 70 women are involved in the search and rescue work of the White Helmets and in their awareness programmes, primarily in the governorates of Idlib and Daraa.
- The White Helmets have saved more than 62,000 lives
- 145 White Helmet volunteers have been killed in Syria while doing their job. *(This number is accurate as of 6 October, 2016)*
- There are 120 Syria Civil Defence centres in Syria. The centres include search and rescue and firefighting teams. They operate across eight Syrian provinces.
- The White Helmets are volunteers and do not receive salaries. They do however receive monthly stipends when funding is available for this.
- The White Helmets receive two types of funding - for direct humanitarian work and to look after the families of those killed. Funding for their humanitarian relief work is received from the aid budgets of Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- They work to a strict code of conduct which insists that every White Helmet is impartial and prohibits them from joining any faction in the conflict.

- The general public has so far contributed over \$1m to the White Helmets' hero fund, which goes to the families of White Helmets who have lost their lives, as well as injured volunteers.
- The White Helmets have been invited to speak at the United Nations four times, and have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize twice.
- The group has repeatedly called on the international community to enforce UN Security Council resolutions related to the protection of civilians in Syria. They demand that the indiscriminate bombing of civilians be stopped.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*These quotes are attributable to Raed Al Saleh, Head of the Syria Civil Defence.*

### **How did the Syria Civil Defence start?**

At the beginning of 2013 there were more and more areas liberated from the control of the Syrian regime. In response to this freedom, the regime increased attacks on these areas using airstrikes, artillery and mortars.

These attacks were killing and injuring civilians every day. In response to this, grassroots initiatives were formed to rescue the victims, many of whom were trapped under rubble. These rescue teams were highly valued and requests for training for these volunteers from the rescuers, humanitarian orgs and the Local Councils in the communities they served increased.

In March 2013 these volunteer rescue workers received their first training in the work of 'civil defence'. With this training the groups became more organised and established civil defence centres and specialized teams. By 2014 there were teams in all seven governorates across Syria.

In October 2014 these self-organised teams came together and voted to form one national organisation: Syria Civil Defence. The Syria Civil Defence is now the largest organisation operating in areas outside of the control of the Syrian regime. It is from the people and for the people.

### **How does the Syrian Civil Defence make decisions / how is it governed?**

The Syria Civil Defence is governed by a Leadership Council that has representatives from all eight governorates that the SCD operates in. This Leadership Council is democratically elected by members of the General Assembly of the Syria Civil Defence. The Head of the Syria Civil Defence is Raed Al Saleh.

The Leadership Council was formed in October 2014 at a conference where the different teams across Syria decided to form one body based on one executive committee working under the same decision-making, following the same values and principles.

### **Why is the SCD being deliberately targeted by airstrikes, and what is the effect on you?**

The Syria Civil Defence are being targeted for saving lives. In Syria this is common -- we have also seen a lot of attacks on hospitals and medical workers for the same reason.

The combination of the role we play in Syria, the profile of the White Helmets around the world and our work to expose war crimes means make us a target for the Russian and Regime forces.

We have had 142 volunteers killed, the majority of these in double-tap strikes where the planes circle back to target the rescue operation. We have had hundreds more volunteers injured and dozens of attacks on SCD centres.

### **What is the role of women in the SCD?**

The Syria Civil Defence has approximately 70 female volunteers. These volunteers are especially critical as in many of the conservative parts of the country they are able to fulfil tasks that male volunteers cannot. They also play a strong role in providing medical care and raising awareness amongst mothers and children.

We have a strong belief that women hold a core role in the building society, in maintaining its peace. Women allow us to reach all different sectors of Syrian society so that we are not limited.

Women do not appear in the majority of SCD photos and videos for two reasons. Firstly, there are some women who do not want to appear in photographs. Second, there are security concerns in some areas and women do not want to show their faces.

### **What does the SCD want the world to know about Syria?**

We want people around the world to know that Syria is not just Assad and Isis. Rather, there are millions trapped in the middle and many heroes serving them, working everyday, dying so that others may live.

We hope that through our work we send a message to the entire world that in Syria there are people called the 'guardians of life'. Not just those who take it. That there are people who believe in peace, in the future, in life in reconciliation between all society.

### **What action do you want to see from the international community outside Syria?**

We want the international community to find its conscience and to use whatever means possible to stop the bombs once and for all. We're asking people to take to the streets to support us.

Negotiations for the sake of negotiations do not help the Syrian people. Every time there is another round of negotiations, whether in Geneva or New York or Moscow or Riyadh, the killing seems only to get worse. The only way to stop the killing is to make sure the criminal bears a heavy cost for continuing his attacks. Each one of these bombs has terrible consequences for people living in Syria. It is time they had consequences for those who drop them.

### **What does the SCD want to be in the future?**

SCD hopes to be the people that rebuild Syria. We want to resettle refugees and rebuild the communities we serve. SCD wants to act as bridges of peace between communities that have been torn apart in this conflict. SCD wants to see the ideals of the revolution come true -- a free, peaceful and democratic Syria.

## **Follow the White Helmets**

- To stay up to date with the work of the White Helmets, follow them on Twitter [@SyriaCivilDef](#)
- **Images and video** of the White Helmets in action may be found [here](#). Please credit Syria Civil Defence.