The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Why it's happening
& what you can do about it
The Collapse of Syria

• 2011 – March uprising begins against Assad government
  – Nationalist opposition (SNF/FSA) organizes
The Collapse of Syria

• 2012 – Open war accelerates, death toll rises rapidly
  – Assad government begins large scale bombing of rebel-held civilian areas
  – Gulf state support for Islamist groups accelerates
  – First accusation (unsubstantiated) of Syrian chemical weapons use against civilians
• President Obama’s “red line” speech
The Collapse of Syria

• 2013 – Violence escalates
  – Hezbollah joins conflict on side of Assad government
  – Series of chemical weapon attacks (confirmed) against civilians by Assad regime
    • US-Russian deal over Syrian chemical weapons
  – Death toll passes 100,000
  – Islamist opposition now dominates Syrian opposition
The Collapse of Syria

• 2014 – ISIS emerges
  – Geneva peace talks fail
  – UN announces Syria is chemical weapons free
  – ISIS makes large strategic gains in Syria and Iraq
    • Renames itself Islamic State
  – US and allies begin anti-ISIS attacks
  – ISIS escalates war against Assad government and all other opposition groups
The Collapse of Syria

• 2015 – violence escalates further
  – Civil war escalates as all sides fight each other
    • First IS use of chemical weapons against civilians
  – Assad regime begins sustained retreat to Alawite heartland
  – Kurds drive IS out of most Kurdish areas of Syria
  – Turkey begins attacks against IS and Kurdish forces
the situation in Syria
The Syrian Civil War

- 220,000 deaths as of February 2015
- 55% of the population has been driven from their homes by fighting
- There are at least four major factions, all fighting each other
The Scope of the Problem

• 3,883,585 refugees are registered with the UN outside of Syria
• 7,632,500 people are displaced inside of Syria
• The total number of displaced persons of all types is over 12,000,000
  – Just from the conflict in Syria
Social Disruption

• Massive displacement has long-term costs
  – 52% of the refugees abroad are children
  – An entire generation’s normal development is disrupted

• The basic security and rule of law have been destroyed
  – A generation is growing up without a concept of normal civil order
The Scope of the Problem

• Syria’s population at the start of the war was about 22,000,000 people

• Over half the population of the country has been forced to leave their homes
It’s Not Just Syrians

• 12 million Syrians are displaced
• 8 million other people from Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Somalia
• All in the same region
The Financial Cost

• UNHCR and NGO organizations asked for $4.53 billion US$ (for 20 million people)
  – $226.50 per refugee for the entire year
• $1.06 billion has been received
  – $53 per refugee
Big Problems, Far Away

• It is easy to think of these as big problems far away
  – Too big for me
  – Too far away to do anything
  – Too complicated

• Besides, the new Game of Thrones is on
What Can Be Done?

• They can’t go home until the war ends
  – And its not ending soon
• Mitigating the harm is the only current option
• So, how do we do that?
Who is Helping?

• In the field:
  – UNHCR: United Nations Refugee Agency
  – ICRC: Red Cross/Red Crescent
  – Hundreds of NGO’s

• Here in Georgia:
  – International Rescue Committee
  – Refugee Women’s Network
  – Other local NGO’s
Cheap and Easy Ways to Help

• Donate money
  – Money is quick and easy
  • UNHCR: http://donate.unhcr.org/international/general
  • Red Cross/Red Crescent: https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/middle-east/syria
  • Kroger Community Rewards Donations: http://kroger.com/communityrewards
  • Amazon Smile: http://smile.amazon.com/
Volunteer

• There are numerous NGO’s/NPO’s operating locally that need volunteers
  – Find an organization that fits
  – Offer to work with them or for them

• Are you learning valuable skills?
  – Social media marketing, communication, etc/
  – Volunteer to apply those
    • Builds your resume/portfolio
    • Does good for humanity
Internships and Service Learning

• Interested in a career in social work?
  – Internships build experience AND make the world better

• UN and other organizations have internships
  – Gain experience in the field
  – Try it out and see if you really want to do it

• Service learning projects give you class credit for working in the field
Lobbying

• The US has offered to take 10,000 refugees this year

• Elected officials are afraid of a backlash from people who don’t want them here
  – Lobby for more aid to support help in the region
  – Lobby to bring more refugees to the US

• Let your elected officials know how you feel
In A Nutshell

• You could have already helped in the time it took me to tell you about all this

• But you can do more, if you want to
• You can help people while gaining experience
• You can even make a career out of it
Look for More Events

• There are more events coming
  – October: Center for Diversity and Inclusion
  – November: Practitioner Panel Discussion

• There are flyers from organizations on the table on your way out