

THE
SYRIA
CAMPAIGN

#SaveIdlib



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2020

ANNUAL REPORT

Supporting Syria's heroes in their struggle for freedom and democracy



▲ Photo: Projecting the photos of detainees onto the Syrian embassy in Berlin.
Photo credit: Janine Graubaum.

Cover photo: Protest in New York in response to attacks on Idlib, January 2020.
Photo credit: John Lamparski / Action For Sama campaign.

Letter from the Executive Director	4
The year in numbers	6
Sounding the alarm on the COVID response	8
Fighting for justice for the missing in Syria	14
“Justice must be the final word”	22
Taking Action for Sama	24
Responding to the assault on Idlib	26
Condemning Russia’s seat on the UN Human Rights Council	30
Supporting The White Helmets	32
Holding the UK government to account	34
Campaigning with heroes	24
Financial data	35
Thank you	38



Photo: Family members of detainees stand beside artist Khaled Barakeh's Mute demonstration outside the courthouse in Koblenz, Germany, where the world's first trial on Syrian state torture began.
Photo credit: Max Eicke.

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear friends,

We look back on 2020 with great sadness for all the lives lost and anger at the failures of the international community to protect Syrians from bombs, COVID, and humanitarian catastrophe.

But I am also immensely proud of all we have achieved in spite of the huge challenges our partners and team have faced. Highlights of the year for me were watching Wafa Mustafa addressing the UN Security Council on behalf of her father and more than 100,000 other detainees, and projecting prison bars and the demands of families of the detainees directly onto the Syrian embassy in Berlin. A new campaign demanding answers about those kidnapped by ISIS was also significant because it put a spotlight on the plight of families, so far largely ignored by the international community.

When Idlib faced intense aerial attacks at the start of the year, we stood alongside Waad al-Kateab outside the UN in New York, to demand an end to the bombing. I am proud that we helped to amplify the voices of doctors in Idlib calling directly on the UN Secretary General Guterres to visit and urge a ceasefire.

Thanks to the creativity, tenacity and persistence of our team, the heroism of our partners, and the unending support of our supporters and donors, we look ahead to 2021 with optimism and many new plans.

With heartfelt thanks and in solidarity,

Laila Kiki
Executive Director, The Syria Campaign

The year in numbers

\$708,124

Raised for the White Helmets



7,619,706

People reached on social media



77,511

Campaign actions by our supporters in response to our petitions and calls to action



120

Photos of Syria's missing people placed in a vigil outside the trial on Syrian state torture in Germany



945

Media stories about our work and our key partners

40

Meetings arranged with policymakers for our partners



A White Helmets volunteer disinfecting a public space in northwest Syria to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
Photo credit: White Helmets



Sounding the alarm on the COVID response

Syria's healthcare system was on its knees even before COVID spread across the country. Hospitals and healthcare centres have been bombed to the ground over years of targeting, with dozens of attacks by the Syrian regime and Russia in 2020 alone. Healthcare workers have been deliberately targeted and detained, while many medics fled Syria for their lives.

Challenging the World Health Organisation and international donors

In reaction to a slow WHO response that vastly underestimated the risk that COVID presented to life in Syria, we worked with healthcare professionals across the country to sound the alarm to the international community.

Two webinars on the severe risks of COVID spreading were attended by staff from the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations and other agencies. The first was co-hosted with Chatham House and the second was arranged with the Idlib Health Directorate (IHD) and highlighted new research that showed that the health system was at risk of collapse if the WHO did not urgently step up its preparedness and response. Dr Munzer al-Khalil of IHD was also interviewed on the BBC's flagship news programme, Today on Radio 4.

“The first international ‘Preparedness and Response Plan’ to combat COVID in northwest Syria, in March 2020, was only for three months, and had only a fraction of the funding necessary for a region with more than one million displaced people. Furthermore, it was far less than the sums for elsewhere in Syria.

“Together with The Syria Campaign, we started a campaign to inform the WHO and the Health Cluster about the situation on the ground and what we needed to respond to the crisis. Thankfully, the international community adapted their plans and dramatically increased the funding. We believe the meetings with decision makers and the public campaigns really helped make a difference. Thank you The Syria Campaign for your efforts.”

Dr Munzer al-Khalil,
Idlib Health Directorate



In regime-held areas of the country, the true number of COVID cases far exceeded the official numbers published. We worked to expose the real scale of the crisis and helped the story of coronavirus spreading across Syria to be told on Channel 4 News, the BBC, CNN and in The Guardian.



Powering the White Helmets' emergency response

The White Helmets leapt into action in response to COVID, sanitising schools, hospitals and camps, running awareness campaigns, and transferring patients to hospitals. They also set up a production line for personal protective equipment, supplying health workers and first responders with masks. Our social media highlighted the response of the White Helmets and our donations from supporters helped fund their activities.



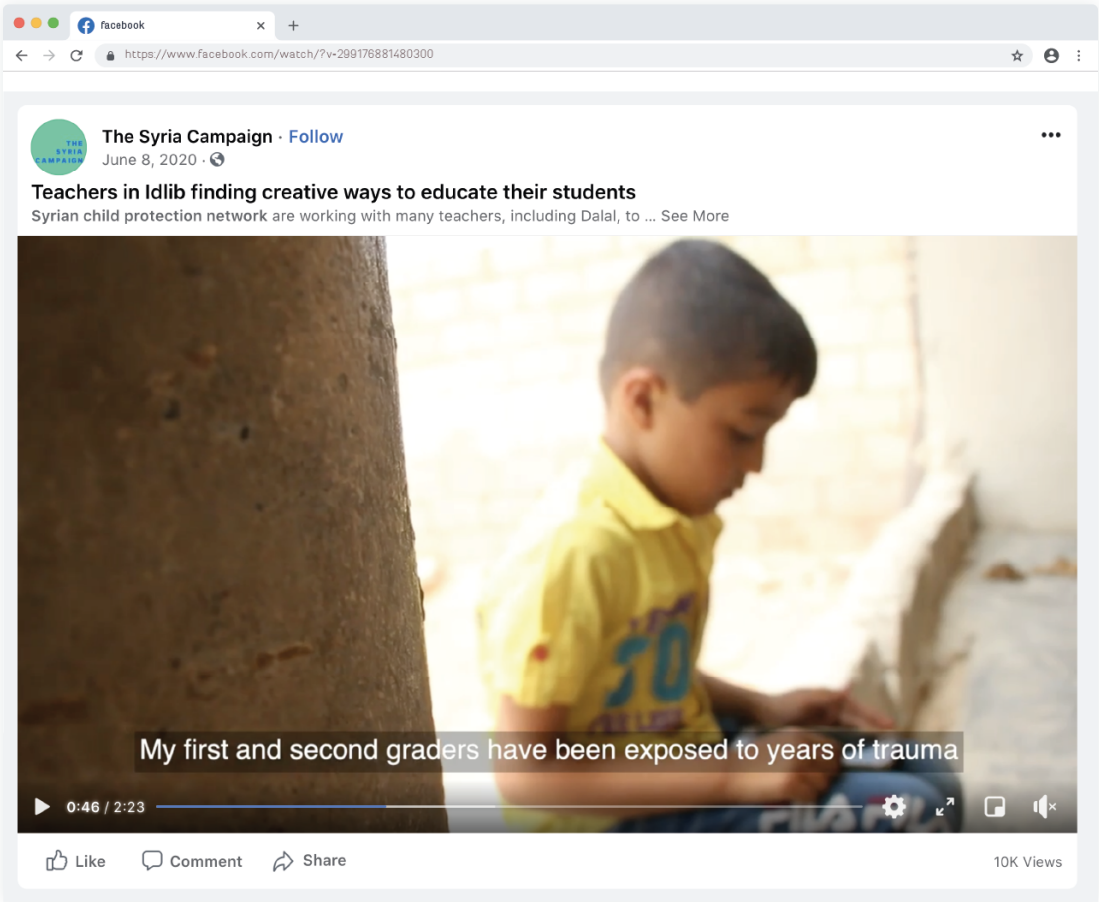
The Syria Campaign's supporters chipped in to help The White Helmets run awareness campaigns in displacement camps to educate people about the risks of COVID-19, and to disinfect public spaces. Photo credit: White Helmets

Keeping education going during COVID

In June, when many schools had to close due to the spread of COVID, teachers across Idlib began to teach over WhatsApp, setting up virtual classrooms for students to learn from their tents and homes. The Syria Campaign's followers on Facebook donated \$5,000 for a new programme to distribute remote learning kits, helping primary school students to keep learning, while going to school wasn't an option.

The kits included internet credits, books, stationary, educational magazines, board games, and a skipping rope, and were distributed by the Syrian child protection and education organisation Hurras Network. Each kit costs \$7 and our supporters' donations helped hundreds of children to continue their education.

We also supported Hurras in their advocacy to the international community by making a film in which female head teachers told their stories and described the challenges they face in their work.



“Through the remote learning fundraising, The Syria Campaign was the first organisation ever to fund internet cards for students in all of Syria. Four months later the UN is now following Hurras’ lead. In the plan for next year they allocated funds to cover internet costs for some students and teachers in northwest Syria.”

Laila Hasso,
Communications Director at Hurras

photo by Hiba Barakat



Photo credit: Guevara Namer

Fighting for justice for the missing in Syria

In 2020, we stepped up our efforts alongside the families of people who are detained or disappeared inside Syria, and to seek justice and accountability for crimes against humanity. Detention and enforced disappearance continue to be used by Assad and other groups as a weapon to terrorise civilians.

At least 1882 people were arrested or detained in 2020, with 157 people documented as killed under torture.

[data: Syrian Network for Human Rights]



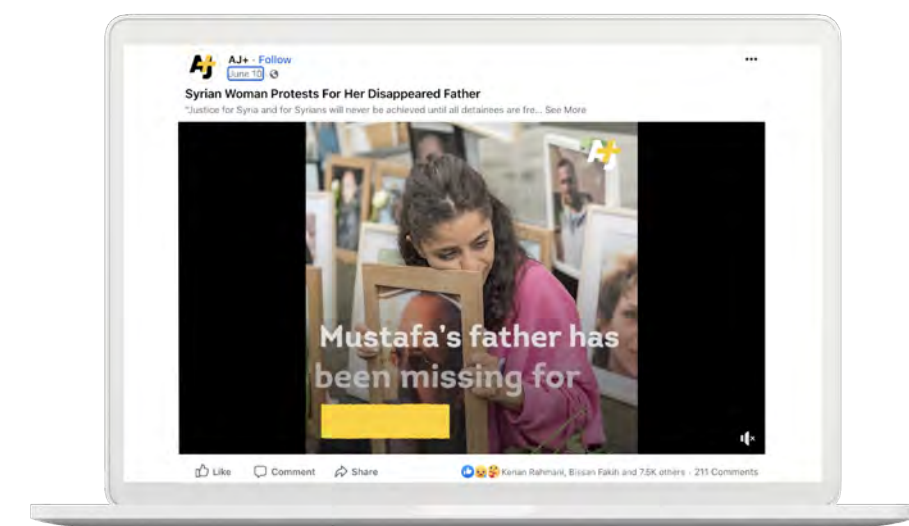
Briefing the United Nations Security Council

In July, Wafa Mustafa of Families for Freedom, the women-led movement for justice and the release of detainees, took the fight for Syria's detained and forcibly disappeared people all the way to the world's highest forum, the UN Security Council.

We supported Wafa to deliver a powerful briefing to the Council, highlighting the story of her own father who was detained in 2013:



“To have a loved one who's disappeared and not know their fate is like waking up one day and realising you have lost a limb. I can tell you it is a growing pain, a pain unlike any other. Even though there is barely anything to hold on to, what keeps me going is to live by what my father has taught me and the hope that one day he will be free and reunited with us.”



Wafa demanded immediate action from the Security Council to ensure the large-scale release of all detainees, especially in light of the escalation of COVID-19 cases in Syria; information about those in detention; an end to torture and impunity and serious steps to hold all perpetrators to account.



Mayas Sheikh Ahmed, Families for Freedom Coordinator in Idlib, organised a protest against enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention, with a new mural painted by the activist and artist Abu Malik Al-Shami.

Demanding the release of Syria's detainees at risk of COVID

This year families of detainees suffered increased uncertainty over the fate of their loved ones knowing that the dire conditions in detention centres makes the spread of COVID inevitable. In March, together with Families for Freedom, we launched a new petition, signed by 16,000 of our supporters, demanding the immediate release of detainees and humanitarian access to detention centres for aid agencies.



18,424 SUPPORTERS

GOAL: 20,000

Artwork by Syrian artist Azza Abo Rebieh

عائلات **FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM** **THE SYRIA CAMPAIGN**

COVID-19: Urgent action to protect Syrian detainees

To the UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen and Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the UN Office for Humanitarian Coordination (OCHA), and members of the UN Security Council:

We call on you to use your power and influence to immediately pressure the Syrian regime to release all detainees held in prisons and unofficial detention centers amid the global rapid spread of the coronavirus.

Women of courage



Families for Freedom continued to grow in strength in 2020. Throughout the year, different members of the movement pushed for justice and accountability in interviews with a wide range of international broadcast outlets including BBC World Service and Al Jazeera. Their impact was recognised when Amina Khouliani, co-founder of the movement, won the International Women of Courage award. During her visit to accept the award in Washington, Amina met with senior policy officials, including Joel Rayburn, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Levant Affairs and Special Envoy for Syria, and David Schenker, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Near East Affairs.

In July, we worked with the makers of a new documentary film, **Ayouni**, to reach new audiences through a series of online events. The film follows Noura Ghazi, one of the co-founders of Families for Freedom, and Machi, the sister of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, a well-known Italian priest who was kidnapped in Syria.





Action outside courthouse in Koblenz
Photo credit: Adam Broomberg

Confronting Syria's torturers in a German court

In April, the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany, began a historic trial on systematic state-sanctioned torture in Syria, the first of its kind anywhere in the world. Syria's survivors of torture continue to testify before the German court, describing the Syrian regime's disease-ridden and overcrowded prison cells, torture, and mass graves. The trial has set an important precedent, as Syrian officials have so far escaped prosecution for crimes against humanity because of Russia's repeated use of the veto for other investigations at the UN Security Council.

It was important to highlight the trial internationally, to encourage other countries to pursue their own trials and mechanisms for justice and accountability. We worked with Families for Freedom and the Caesar Families Association to display photographs of 120 missing people directly outside the courthouse in July 2020.

The action was covered by both German and international press, including a Channel 4 news report by Syrian filmmaker Waad Al-Kateab, and an op-ed by Wafa Mustafa of Families for Freedom in Bild, German's biggest selling newspaper.

A webinar on the trials, together with Families for Freedom, the Berlin Volksbühne theatre and Bard College Berlin, was attended by representatives from the UN, the US State Department, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), journalists and aid agencies.



Supporting a 'Mute' protest in Germany.

In July, we partnered with the Syrian conceptual artist Khaled Barakeh to exhibit his artwork outside the Koblenz trial. Forty-nine figures dressed in the clothes of Syrian activists stood outside the courthouse, representing the Syrian protestors who were unable to be there in person, and in celebration of so many who continue to stand up for human rights.

"It reminds me of the 2011 demonstrations, this was my first impression when I saw the installation. Then I felt saddened because these voices have become muted. I wish these true voices calling for freedom and justice will be heard again in Syria."

Fadwa Mahmoud,
founding member of Families for Freedom



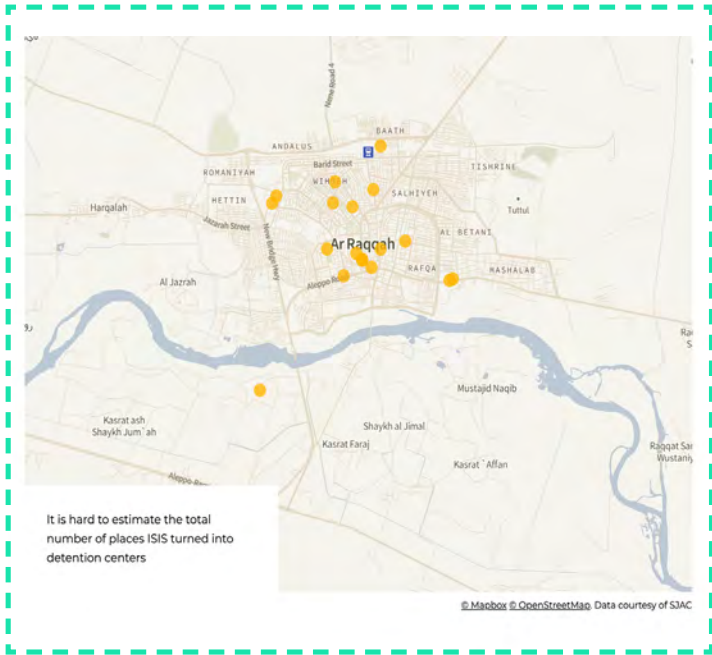
Khaled Barakeh with his artwork
Photo credit: Adam Broomberg

Searching for truth after ISIS

Thousands of Syrians were kidnapped by ISIS, but even after the fall of the extremist group, not enough has been done to find them, give answers to their families, or to seek justice for these crimes. In September, we launched a new campaign demanding urgent steps to uncover their fate.

In partnership with the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) and the families of the disappeared people, we launched the website 'Searching for Truth after ISIS'. The English-Arabic site features interviews with family members about their sons, sisters, and husbands who were taken. Maps of the prisons and grave sites help to reveal the network of mass graves that are still being discovered.

Thousands of people have signed onto our petition and the campaign has put renewed pressure on the international community and the Syrian Democratic Council to investigate the fate of the missing. Questions have been asked in the UK parliament, and stories have been published on the BBC, Vice News, Voice of America, The Times, Daily Telegraph and two Italian newspapers.

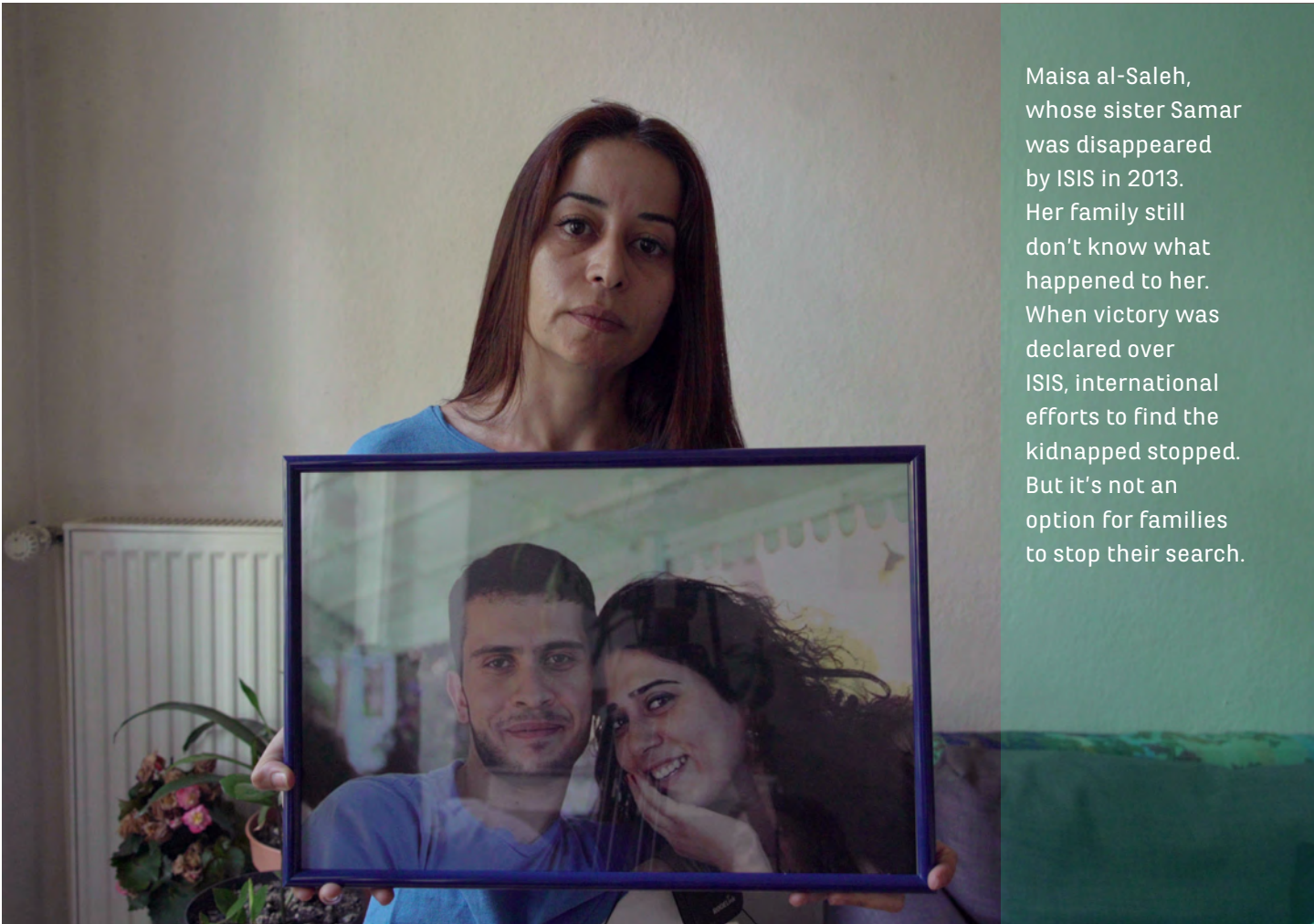


“We were eager to work with The Syria Campaign because of their great success in supporting survivor groups and setting them up to conduct high-quality advocacy activities.”

Muhammad Abdullah,
Syria Justice and Accountability Center



Ensaf Nasr holding a portrait of her missing husband, Fouad al-Mohamad



Maisa al-Saleh, whose sister Samar was disappeared by ISIS in 2013. Her family still don't know what happened to her. When victory was declared over ISIS, international efforts to find the kidnapped stopped. But it's not an option for families to stop their search.



Dr. Ayham Ghazzoul was a dentist pursuing his Masters.



"Just must be the final word"

For many Syrians living in Germany, the presence of a Syrian embassy in Berlin is a reminder of the regime's responsibility for the detention and disappearance of their loved ones. In August on International Day of the Disappeared we worked with families of the missing to project their messages directly onto the building and turn the embassy into a giant prison with Assad behind bars. The video of the projection has been viewed more than 300,000 times online.

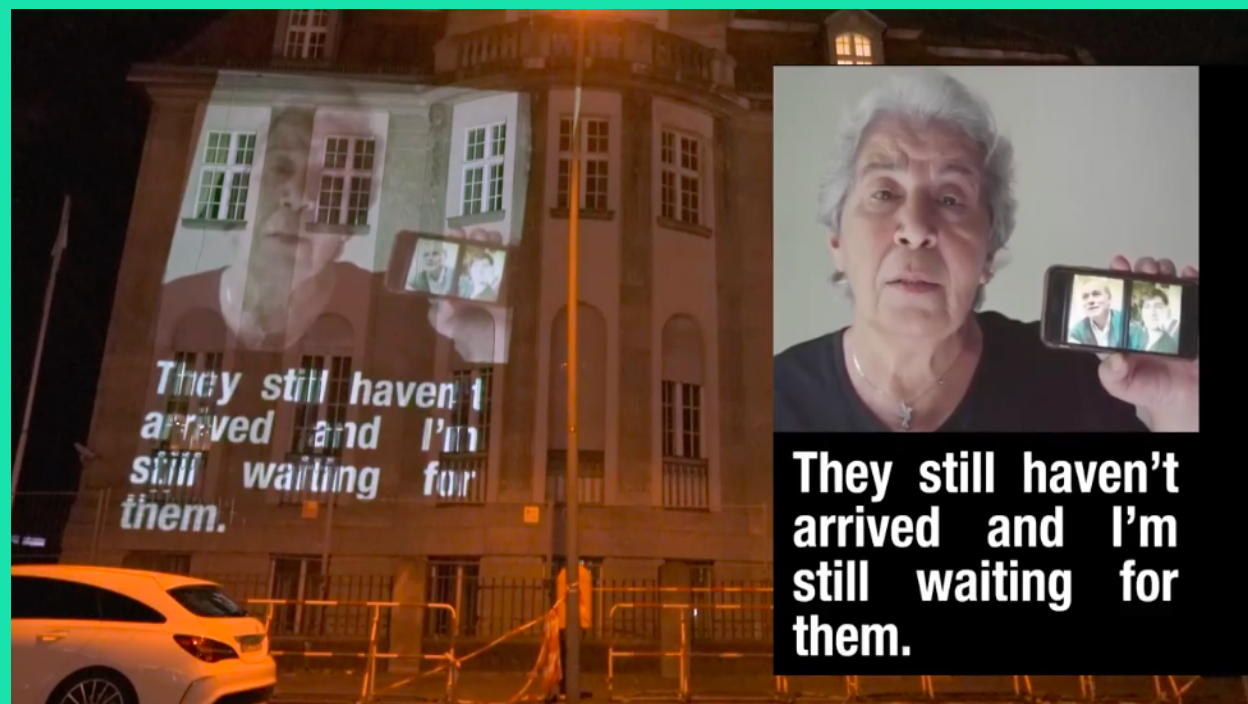


Maryam Al Hallak is projected onto the building saying,

"Dr Ayham Ghazzoul was a dentist pursuing his masters. He was detained from Damascus University in November 2012. The day before he had come from Beirut. Before he left for university he said to me: 'Mama, it was an amazing trip, I'll tell you about it when I come back.' I'm still waiting for him to come back and tell me."

Fadwa Mahmoud fills a third of the embassy to deliver her heartbreaking message,

"On 20th September 2012, my husband and my son were arrested at Damascus airport. The last thing I heard from my son was, 'Mama, prepare the lunch for us to have together.' They still haven't arrived and I'm still waiting for them. Every time I set the table I wish they'd come and have lunch with me."



They still haven't arrived and I'm still waiting for them.

Alongside Waad al-Kateab outside the UN in New York, demanding international action to stop Russia and the Syrian regime's intense offensive on northwest Syria.

Photo credit: John Lamparski / Action For Sama campaign.



Taking Action for Sama

Waad al-Kateab's BAFTA-award winning documentary For Sama, about life under siege in Aleppo, brought global attention to the bombing of hospitals and civilian homes.

In January, we joined Waad, Amnesty International, The Syrian American Medical Society, and Physicians for Human Rights to protest outside the United Nations in New York, to demand action to protect hospitals and civilians in Idlib.

We helped facilitate meetings for the Action For Sama team with influential people and policy makers, including Ivanka Trump, Nancy Pelosi, and 14 Representatives of the US House and Senators. We also helped arrange a screening of For Sama at the US State Department.

In September we hosted an online event with Waad al-Kateab and Family for Freedom's Wafa Mustafa for artists, public figures, policy makers and media on the UN Security Council's response to Syria and the Koblenz trial.

"I'm so grateful for the work of The Syria Campaign. This year they have continued to amplify the work of heroes in their struggle for freedom and democracy even when the rest of the world is too busy to pay attention. Wherever decisions on Syria were being made, they were there raising the alarm and demanding action – from the UN Security Council, to the World Health Organisation, the UN Human Rights Council, and capitals around the world. They have elevated the calls of families of those kidnapped by ISIS and teachers working on the frontline."

Waad al-Kateab, filmmaker

Photo: We also worked alongside Action For Sama to encourage British MPs to watch For Sama on the 9th Anniversary of the Syrian revolution, and to act to protect civilians under attack in Idlib.





Photo credit: The White Helmets

Responding to the assault on Idlib

Between January and March, close to one million people were forced to flee their homes due to a relentless bombing campaign by the regime and Russia, which resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises of the entire conflict. Most of the displaced, half of whom were children, took shelter in muddy tents near the Turkish border and endured rain, snow and below freezing temperatures.

We coordinated closely with our Syrian partners in Idlib to highlight the scale of the crisis and we worked with international outlets such as ITV News, Channel 4 News, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera to cover the crisis. Our supporters helped to raise more vital attention by sharing emergency briefings on the situation with their representatives, signing our petition and sharing social media alerts.



#GuterresVisitIdlib

The continued failure of the UN to protect Syrian civilians has been one of the greatest international failures of the past decade.

In February, doctors, nurses, and humanitarians in Idlib called on UN Secretary General António Guterres to visit them in Syria, as an act of solidarity that would have shown real resolve to stop the attacks on hospitals and civilians.

Under the hashtag #GuterresVisitIdlib, dozens of doctors and healthcare workers called on Guterres to visit Idlib, prompting figures including the UK MP Andrew Mitchell and David Milliband, chief executive of the International Rescue Committee, to echo their call. UN member states also added their support and pressure on Guterres. Though Guterres himself never visited Idlib, Mark Lowcock, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, visited the Syrian-Turkish border in March to meet with humanitarian groups.

Condemning Russia's seat on the UN Human Rights Council

"In a few days Russia could be elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council."

"How could a state that has deliberately targeted hospitals and bombed Syrian civilians, illegally annexed Crimea, and perpetrated ethnic cleansing in Georgia, win a seat at the world's top human rights body? It is running unopposed."

Petition to member states of the UN General Assembly

In October, the international human rights abuser Russia became a candidate for a seat on the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. In response, we coordinated an open letter calling on governments to oppose its election that was signed by more than 40 Syrian, Ukrainian and Georgian civil society groups. And we launched a petition that was signed by more than 11,000 people from around the world to draw widespread attention to Russia's unjust candidacy.

Although Russia won its seat unopposed, our campaign highlighted the absurdity of a state that has committed gross and systematic human rights violations being elected to the Human Rights Council. We showed that civil society groups in Syria, Ukraine and Georgia will continue to stand up against Russia's human rights abuses, even when international governments refuse to do so.

Image credit: Syrian artist Omar Almasri made this image of the UN Human Rights Council under attack for our campaign to stop international human rights abuser Russia joining the world's top human rights body.

Supporting The White Helmets

In 2020, the White Helmets continued to save the lives of civilians under attack, while also responding to the new threat of COVID. Between January and March, White Helmets volunteers saved 1,174 civilians from under the rubble, during the heaviest attacks on Idlib since the beginning of the conflict.

In February, Raed Saleh, the Head of the White Helmets, visited London to call for British support for a ceasefire in Idlib and urgent humanitarian support. We helped organise his briefing at the Houses of Parliament and secure interviews with BBC News and Channel 4 News.

When a ceasefire was brokered in March, White Helmets teams quickly provided essential services such as rubble removal, the rehabilitation of schools and bakeries, and the disposal of more than 22,000 unexploded ordnances.

Then COVID hit, posing a massive threat and making cross-border aid deliveries even more difficult. The White Helmets transformed their small uniform production facility into a production line of masks and Personal Protective Equipment for health workers, and established an oxygen cylinders factory to supply medical centres amidst severe shortages.

Testifying before the US Senate

On March 11th, following months of horrific bombing and displacement in Idlib, Raed Saleh testified at a Full Committee Hearing of the US Senate entitled 'Nine Years of Brutality: Assad's Campaign Against the Syrian People'. This was the first time that the White Helmets have been able to testify in a full hearing of the US Senate and it allowed US Senate members to hear first-hand why action was necessary to stop the Idlib assault.



Our supporters donated **\$708,124** to the White Helmets






We worked with headteachers in Idlib alongside Hurras Education Network to successfully call on the UK to raise the amount of UK aid provided for teachers salaries in northwest Syria.
photo by Hiba Barakat

Holding the UK government to account

In November, the UK government announced it would reduce aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP, with Syria reported to be one of the countries seeing the largest reduction in funding. We asked our UK-based supporters to contact their MPs, demanding action on this and other issues. Close to 600 people contacted their parliamentarians, and in December there were 23 questions on Syria asked in parliament – the largest spike of the year.



Please feel free to add your own words to the email to your MP.

Right now the government is reviewing its policy on Syria, with the potential to save lives on the ground and finally hold war criminals to account. But ten years into the conflict, while the UK is dealing with COVID and Brexit at home, there's a risk that Syria will fall further down the UK's priorities. We cannot let this happen.

Ask your MP to protect civilians, prevent COVID-19, and hold war criminals to account in Syria

2021 marks ten years since the Syrian people rose up peacefully against four decades of dictatorship to demand democracy and dignity. Bashar al-Assad's regime crushed that uprising with force, triggering an international war that has killed more than 500,000 and driven millions from their homes.

Not Ruairi Nolan? [Click here.](#)

Because of new rules in the EU, we can only update you about this campaign if you click yes on the button below. Are you happy to receive urgent actions and updates from Syrian families, rescue workers, and more through the Syria Campaign?

☐ Yes ☐ No


[SEND LETTER](#)

Campaigning with heroes

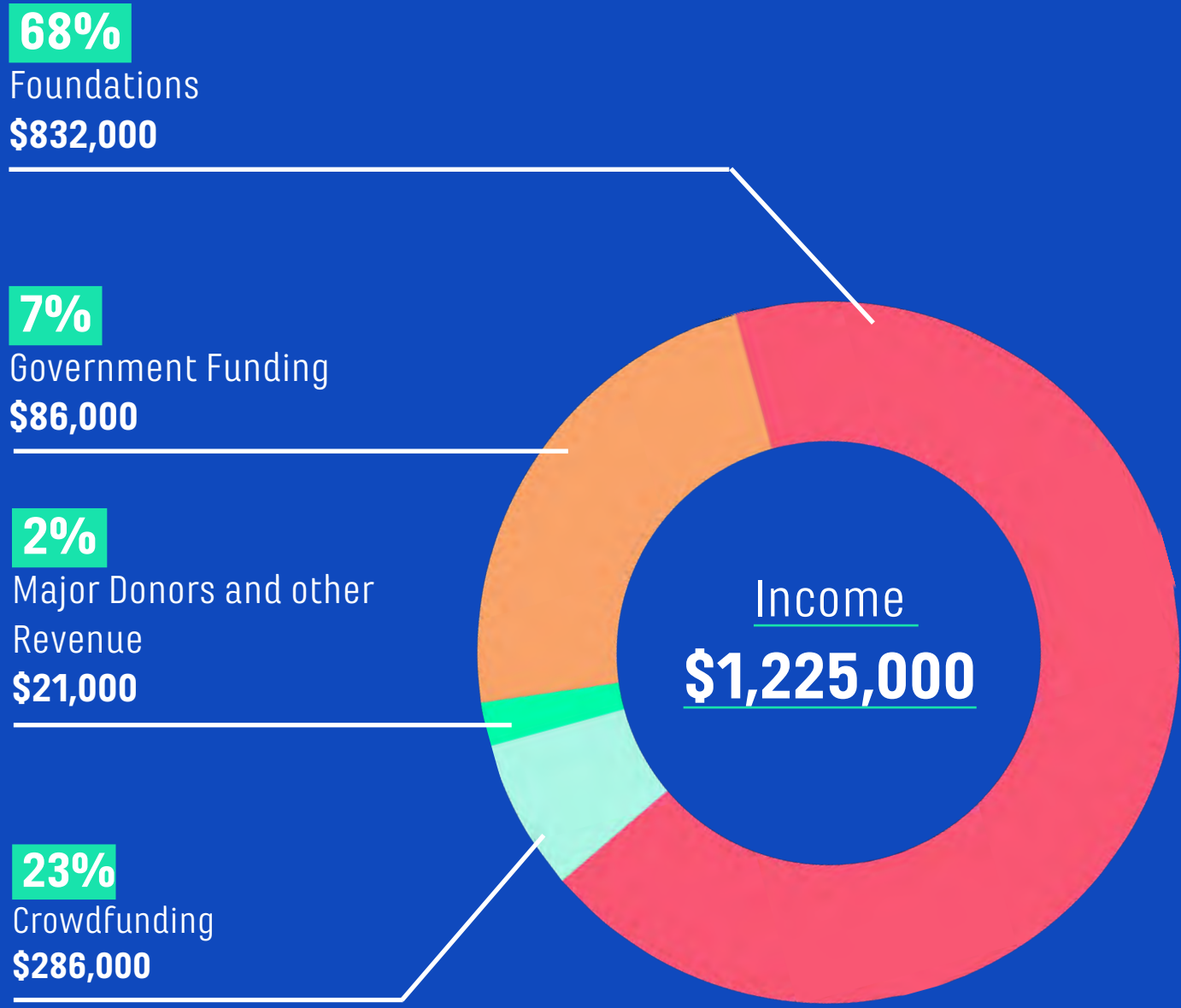
In March, we launched a new campaigning guide for human rights activists in the MENA region, based on more than 30 case studies from The Syria Campaign's work and that of our partners. The guide covers topics from designing campaigns and achieving media coverage to launching a digital campaign. All the content is available in English and Arabic. Staff and activists from more than 20 organisations have already registered to use the guide.

The guide is based on in-person and online trainings that we continued to run this year with many of our partners, including the White Helmets and Families for Freedom.

► [Guide.thesyriacampaign.org](https://guide.thesyriacampaign.org)



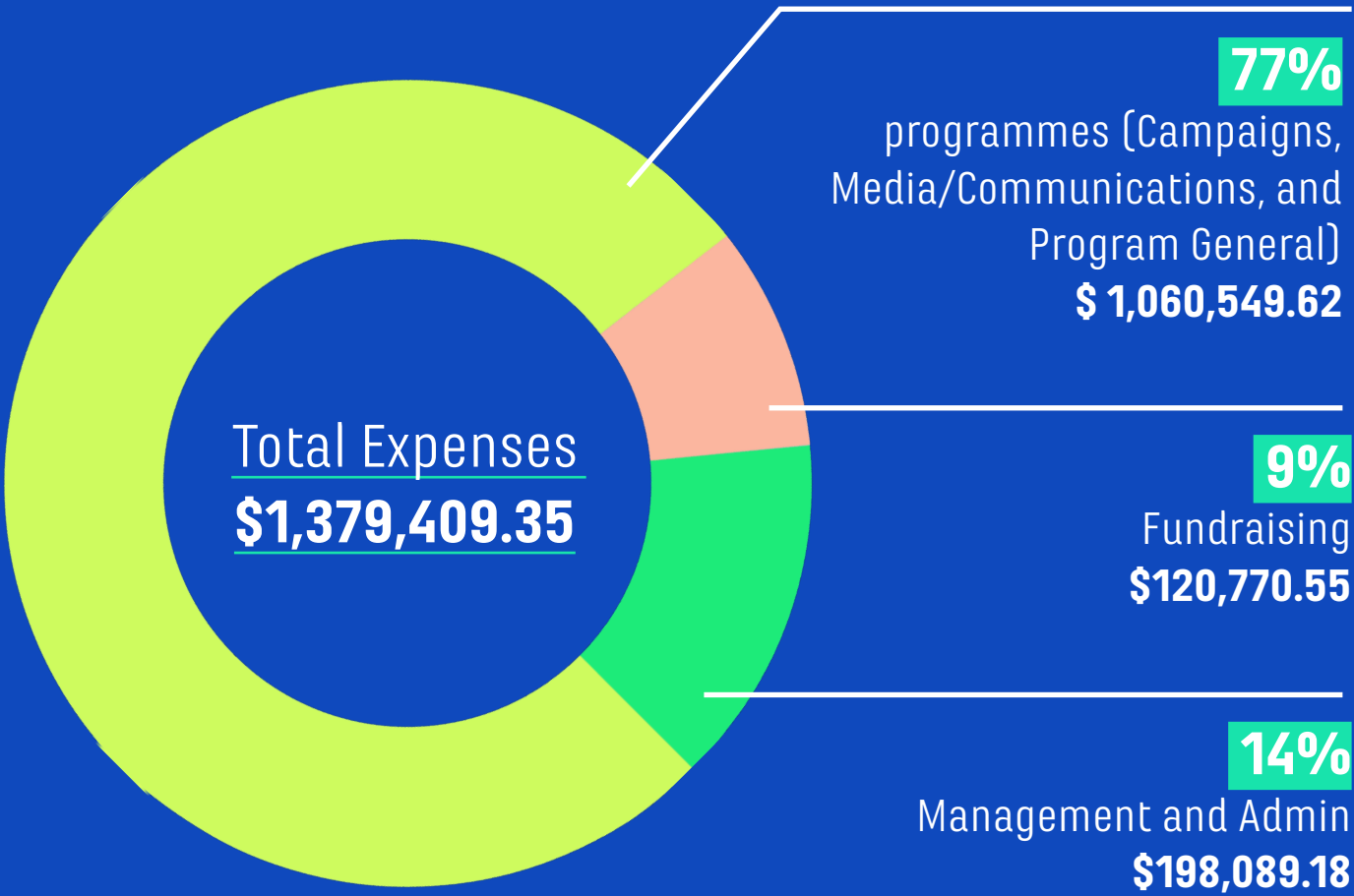
Financials



In addition, we raised **\$1,062,208.31** for the White Helmets, **\$708,124.65** of which came from **8191 supporters** in 2020.

Donors and supporters:

- ▶ Asfari Foundation
- ▶ Oak Foundation
- ▶ Choose Love
- ▶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- ▶ Global Fund for Women
- ▶ IREX
- ▶ Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- ▶ Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC)
- ▶ The State of the Netherlands, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs
- ▶ Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- ▶ Crowdfunding - from 1998 supporters



Figures listed here are for 2020 and are pre-audit.

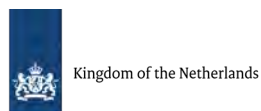
Thank you

We are grateful to the individuals and foundations whose generosity and commitment make possible every campaign we launch, story we tell, and advocacy meeting we hold.

We thank our board of directors for their guidance and expertise during a challenging year.

Our global community of supporters is at the core of our work and impact. By continuing to stand in solidarity with Syrian civilians long after the world's media and decision makers have turned away, they are building power behind the Syrian people's demands for rights and justice.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the humanitarians, doctors, nurses, storytellers, educators, feminists, artists, human rights defenders, and every Syrian who hasn't given up on the struggle for freedom and justice. We are honoured to work alongside them. Their courage and determination are our northstar.



Wafa Mustafa lays a flower beside photos of the missing in Syria outside the Koblenz courthouse, July 2020.
Photo by Max Eicke.





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