

Statement by Nujeen Mustafa

Dublin Adoption Conference

Dublin Castle, Ireland
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Your excellences, ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues,

My name is Nujeen Mustafa. I would like to thank the government of Ireland for giving me an opportunity to speak to you today on this historic day. I am so happy to be here.

I addressed one of the last meetings where states were negotiating the political declaration that has now been adopted here today. I am very happy that you have come here to show your support for this political declaration and to commit to taking action to help protect civilians in war.

I believe that this declaration can make a positive difference. But this will only happen if we all work together, and take responsibility for making sure it has a meaningful impact in the world. The work starts here.

I have high hopes that this declaration will change the situation for the many people worldwide who suffer from bombing and shelling in their hometowns.

I was one of them.

I was born in Aleppo and lived there until I was 12 years old. We lived in an apartment on the 5th floor of a building with no lift. So going out and going to school was not an option. I did not receive formal education also due to the lack of accessible infrastructure and accessible schools in my home country.

I spent my time reading books and watching TV shows. This is how I learned English by the way, with TV and books as the main source for my education.

This is a brief summary of my life before the war. It wasn't perfect but I loved it.

When the conflict broke out, and the bombing started I became very anxious and worried and didn't feel secure in my own home. As the sound of the bombing grew louder and louder I put the volume of the television higher and higher. Unlike other people I could not run away and hide. Living in an upper floor without lift, I could not quickly reach the safe shelter in my wheelchair if we needed to evacuate.

If we are being honest, nobody thinks about people like me. People who do not have a place to hide. Who have no means to protect themselves or escape a situation that

endangers their lives. I was terrified, but I tried very hard not to panic, because I knew that there was nothing anyone in my family could do to make the situation better. So I tried to stay strong for everyone.

It became clear that we had to leave if we wanted a future away from the bombs. So I left with my sister, without my parents. At just sixteen, I made the 3,500-mile journey from Syria to Germany in my wheelchair. I was pushed, pulled and carried across 8 country borders. The rough terrain was not suitable for a wheelchair, not to mention the dangerous sea journey with the wheelchair on the rubber boat...

I am in a safe country now, doing much better, but the feelings I experienced at the time, the feeling of be under great risk of danger, that things are going to go from bad to worse, is something I will never forget. This is what happens when civilians are bombed.

The sense of peace and security is taken away and replaced by fear and uncertainty. And the insecurity is even bigger for women like my sister and myself.

All that civilians in a conflict zone can do is focus on survival because there's no possibility for a normal life with plans, aspirations and achievements. This leads to psychological trauma.

This is a reminder for everyone that when civilians are bombed it's not only their lives, cities and homes that are lost but also their future.

In many ways, I was lucky, and I can live safely in Germany now – but believe me I would have loved to stay in my hometown.

By signing on to this declaration you have declared yourself as willing to end the suffering that many civilians like me experience from the use of explosive weapons in cities and towns. And you also declare to assist the victims and the communities affected by armed conflicts.

I encourage you to honour this commitment and again:

I hope that the signing of the declaration will not be just a piece of paper – but will be the beginning of a real change! People suffering in wars around the world need it!

Thank you.