

2nd Opinion: Offering hope to Syrian refugees in Lebanon

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I recently heard about a mother's incredible journey of peace and reconciliation during my trip to Lebanon as part of the [21st Century Wilberforce Initiative's](#) efforts to support education and training.



Elijah Brown In 1990, Adeline was a young mom and pregnant with her second child. Lebanon was in the midst of a war with Syria. Adeline, her husband and their son had been captured, lined up and were facing a firing squad. Adeline closed her eyes and prayed she would pass quickly and without witnessing her husband and son suffer through their own executions. At the last moment, a Lebanese tank emerged, firing a shell that decimated the Syrian soldiers. Miraculously, the family was unharmed.

For six years after these events, Adeline prayed and fasted for God to remove the hatred she felt toward those who almost murdered her family. As war has engulfed Syria and more than 1 million Syrian refugees have poured into Lebanon, Adeline is not only free from her hatred, but is working for a Christian organization that supports Syrian refugees.

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the 5-year-long war in Syria is largely sectarian, and its history of religious diversity may be lost: *“Syria’s religious communities are largely deprived of religious freedom. ... Sunni Muslims (the majority) generally associate all Alawites and Shi’a Muslims with the regime of President al-Assad, an Alawite himself, and many Alawites, Shi’a Muslims, Christians and others believe that they will be killed by ISIL and other extremist Sunni groups if the al-Assad government falls. ... Well over half of Syria’s pre-conflict population has fled to neighboring countries or is internally displaced.”*

In short, there is almost nowhere in Syria where one has freedom of conscience.

On my trip, I also met a Lebanese pastor who trained as a child soldier to fight against the Syrians. He now is leading his church to begin an education center for Syrian refugee children.

Even though these servant leaders face personal threats to their lives, they continue to provide education, food and practical assistance to the refugees. When asked about the message he would most like to communicate to the United States, this pastor implored: “You are living in the comfort zone and living in fear. We are in the conflict zone, and we are experiencing victory every day.”

The choice to serve and to extend a welcoming relationship is making a difference. One Muslim refugee family described how it chose to live in the area of the church because the Christian community had a reputation of being safer, of not cheating, and of extending respect and rights to all people. A young Muslim student at the education center said she had learned from the Bible she was “to love everybody because everybody is created equally.”

May we all work to further religious freedom as a universal right.

Action items you can take:

- Support the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative's [Ruth Project](#), which provides education tuition for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- Read the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2015 [report on Syria](#).
- Take a moment to recommit to working for religious freedom in 2016, considering the manner in which you forward emails and post to social media and the personal endeavors you can take to support those being persecuted around the world.

Elijah Brown is executive vice president of the [21st Century Wilberforce Initiative](#). Adeline's name has been changed for her safety.