



# EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN SYRIA

September 2015



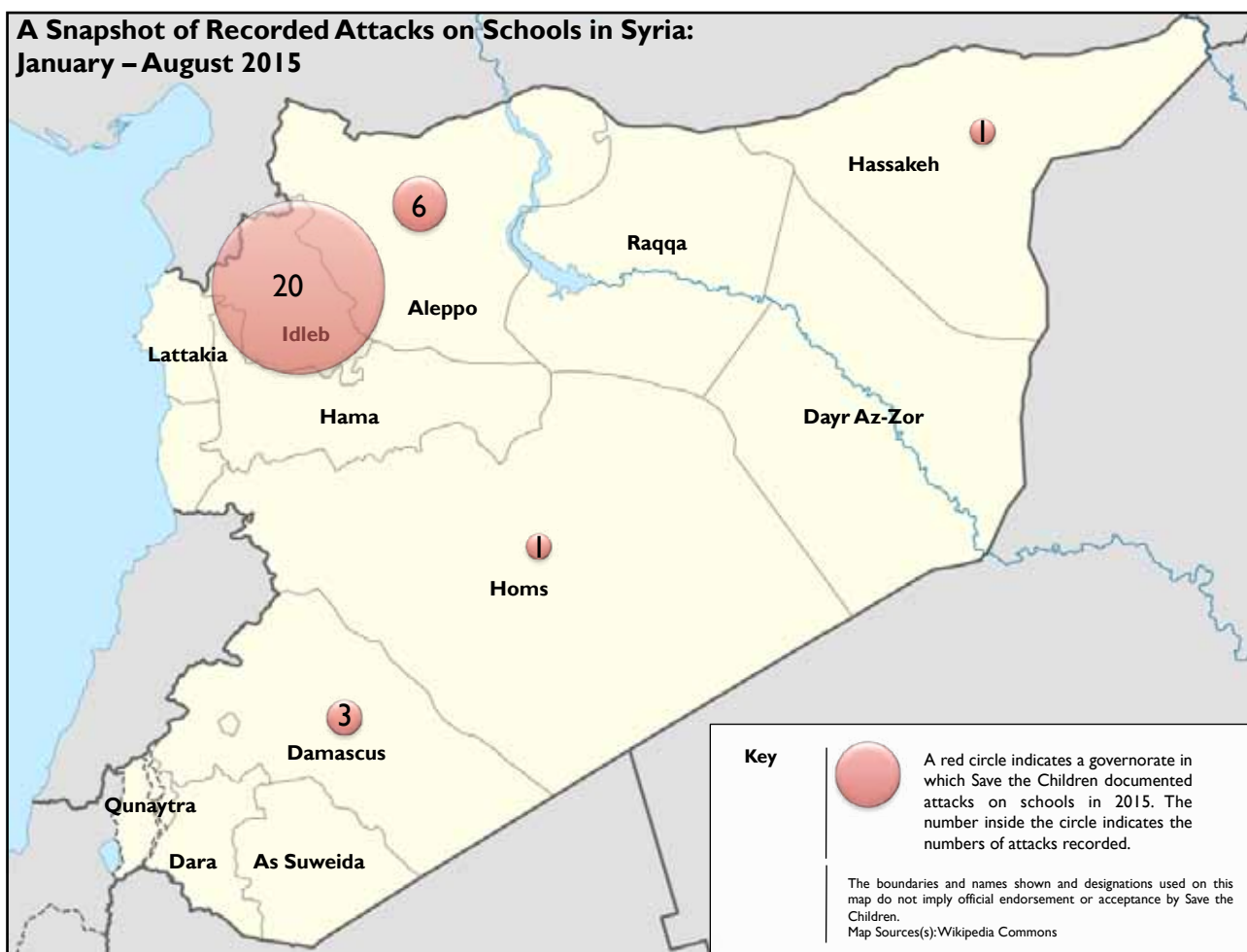
Photo: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

This school, supported by Save the Children, in the Idleb suburbs in Northern Syria, was attacked and bombed three times. Luckily the attacks took place just after the children had left school or before they arrived, but still lives were lost. Save the Children rehabilitated the school twice, but after the third bombing the school was deemed no longer safe and so it was closed.

**Cover photo:** Khalid,\* age 7, who suffered severe injuries and lost his hand when his school in Northern Syria was attacked in March 2015. The children were taking their exams and at 9am took a break in the schoolyard, when two missiles fell on the school. One fell just outside the school's gate, killing five children and injuring fifty more. The other missile fell on the teachers' room, killing three teachers and injuring six others.

In order to protect children and teachers who agreed to be interviewed by Save the Children, names in this report have been changed and exact locations omitted. All testimonies are from Syria.

All photos in this report were taken by Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children



**More than half of all attacks on schools in the last four years have occurred in Syria, according to analysis by Save the Children.** Between 2011 and the end of 2014, the UN Secretary General reported 8,428 attacks on schools in 25 countries, with 52% of these reported to have taken place in Syria. Since the start of 2015, Save the Children research has documented at least 32 attacks in Syria, but lack of access to many areas means the total number is likely to be much higher. In 2014 alone, 160 children were killed in attacks on schools in Syria.<sup>1</sup>

**The military use of schools was documented in 26 countries between 2005 and early 2015, with Syria the most affected country.<sup>2</sup>** More than 1,000 schools have been used as temporary bases, military staging ground or detention or torture centers,<sup>3</sup> and new incidents by all sides continue to be reported. This is especially concerning as the exact number is unknown and likely to be much higher due to lack of access and under-reporting. The use of schools by the government armed forces and opposition groups has resulted in damage to buildings, equipment and teaching materials.

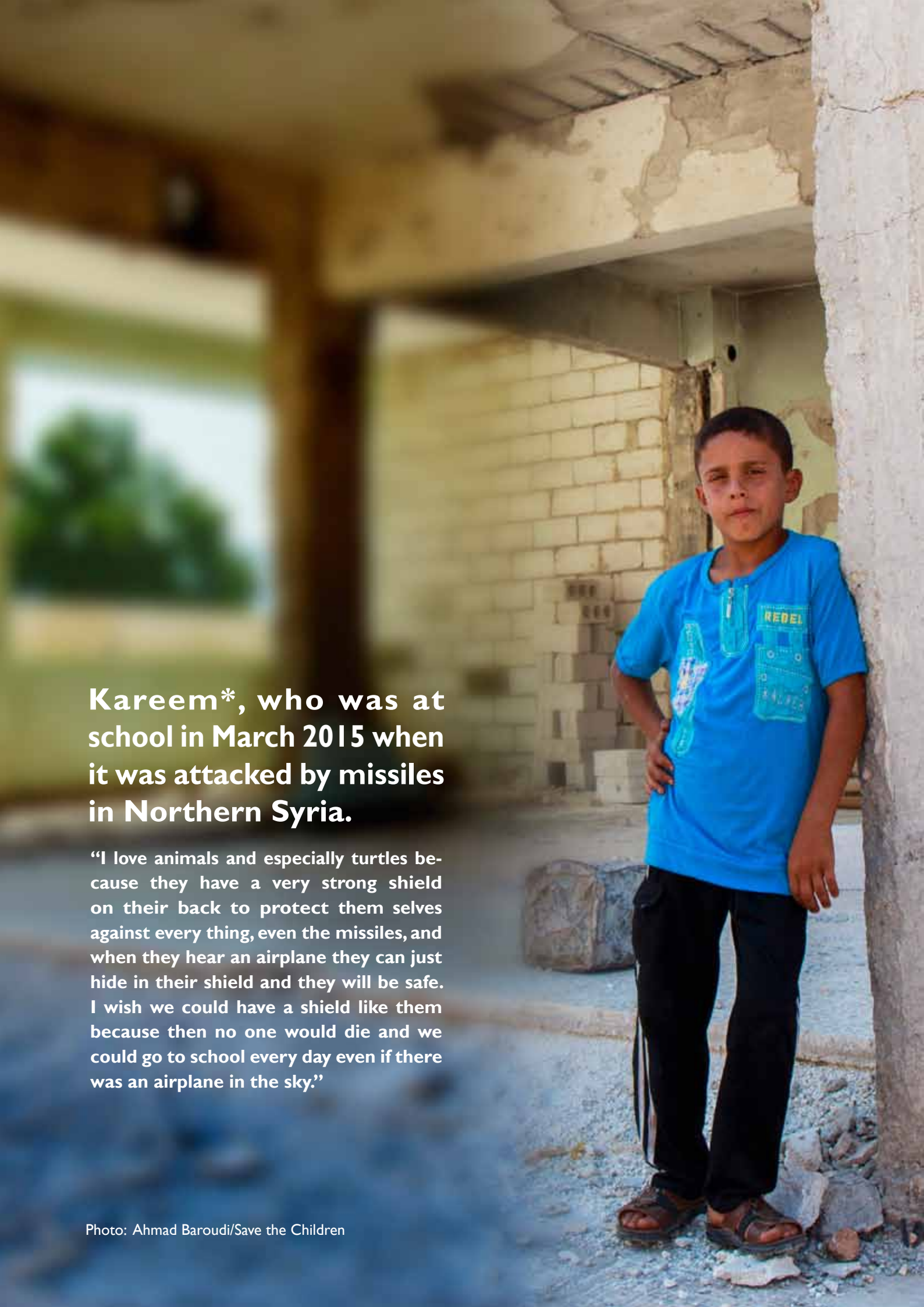
**Schools supported by Save the Children have also come under attack.** In the past two years there have been 51 incidents affecting schools that benefit from Save the Children programs. These include 32 airstrikes, as well as arson, forcible entry of armed groups, shootings and threats against teachers and students. On 2 April 2015, a barrel bomb damaged a primary school run by a Save the Children partner in Aleppo, forcing 700 children to be evacuated. Last year, three schools we support in Idleb governorate were so severely damaged that they had to be rebuilt, while another was so badly damaged by multiple strikes that it can no longer be used. One missile strike directly landed in the school playground.

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children et al, *Failing Syria*, March 2015

[https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bp-failing-syria-UNSC-resolution-120315-en1.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-failing-syria-UNSC-resolution-120315-en1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> GCPEA, *Lessons in War 2015: Military Use of Schools and Universities during Armed Conflict*, 2015, p 6.

<sup>3</sup> The Syrian Network for Human Rights, *A Report on the Destruction of Schools Its Consequences*, 2013. [http://sn4hr.org/public\\_html/wp-content/pdf/english/A%20report%20on%20the%20destruction%20of%20schools%20and%20its%20consequences.pdf](http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/A%20report%20on%20the%20destruction%20of%20schools%20and%20its%20consequences.pdf) (accessed July 13, 2015).

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a bright blue t-shirt and black pants, stands in a damaged, light-colored brick building. He is leaning against a white pillar on the right. The t-shirt has a graphic with the word 'REBEL' and some other text. The background shows a doorway and a wall with some damage. The ground is covered in rubble and debris.

**Kareem\*, who was at school in March 2015 when it was attacked by missiles in Northern Syria.**

“I love animals and especially turtles because they have a very strong shield on their back to protect them selves against every thing, even the missiles, and when they hear an airplane they can just hide in their shield and they will be safe. I wish we could have a shield like them because then no one would die and we could go to school every day even if there was an airplane in the sky.”

**Schools are regularly forced to suspend activities due to bombing or escalations in conflict nearby** – in May 2015 the local authorities in Aleppo closed all the city’s schools due to increased airstrikes, preventing thousands of children from sitting their end of year exams. Some schools in Aleppo have had to move classrooms underground into basements to try and keep children safe. Save the Children and partners have helped make adaptations to schools such as using plastic instead of glass windows.

Attacks on schools include aerial bombardment, shelling and the use of Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED.) Among the most egregious examples reported by the UN occurred in Aleppo in April 2014 where an attack on a primary school left 33 children dead and 40 injured.<sup>4</sup> In March 2015 a school in Armanaz village, Idleb governorate was damaged, killing six students, one teacher and injuring many others.<sup>5</sup> The UN estimated in December 2014 that one-quarter of schools in Syria had been damaged, destroyed, put to use as collective centers for displaced people, or used for other non-educational purposes.<sup>6</sup> This number is now likely to be much higher.

**The blatant targeting of innocent children through attacks on schools is compounding an already dire humanitarian crisis.** Now in its fifth year, the conflict in Syria shows no signs of abating and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate by the day. An estimated 300,000 people<sup>7</sup> are believed to have been killed in the fighting, including nearly 12,000 children<sup>8</sup>, and many more have been injured and maimed. More than 11.6 million people have been forced from their homes because of the fighting<sup>9</sup>, including over four million into neighbouring countries.

**As the new school year begins, almost three million Syrian children are out of school – more than two thirds of them still inside Syria.** School enrolment rates, which were close to 100% before the conflict began, have plummeted to less than 50% and are even lower where prolonged heavy fighting has taken place.<sup>10</sup> Among displaced children, enrolment is even lower at 17%.<sup>11</sup> In Aleppo, where in non-government controlled eastern areas 40% of schools have been shelled at least once, enrolment has dropped as low as 6%. Schools in Syria have lost at least 22% of teaching staff, with many forced to flee the conflict themselves and seek refuge in neighboring countries.

**This situation is damaging not only to these children’s future prospects, but also to peace, stability and prosperity in the region.** Unfortunately many of the 3 million Syrian children out of school may never complete their education. There is a real prospect of a lost generation of Syrian children, facing a future of limited opportunity. Children are at increased risk of human rights abuses by parties to the conflict, as education can help protect children from recruitment

4 Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/409](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/409)

5 Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), UN Doc. S/2015/265, 17 April 2015 [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/264](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/264)

6 Humanitarian Country Team, 2015 Strategic Response Plan, Syrian Arab Republic, December 2014, p. 3.

[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015\\_SRP\\_Syria\\_EN\\_AdvanceCopy\\_171214.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_SRP_Syria_EN_AdvanceCopy_171214.pdf)

7 <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/2015/06/320000-people-killed-since-the-beginning-of-the-syrian-revolution/>

8 Ibid

9 7.6m IDPs, plus more than 4m refugees

10 Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA), December 2013, p.33

11 Ibid.

and sexual violence by armed groups, and children are at greater risk of being drawn into the worst forms of child labour and early marriage. During times of conflict and insecurity, maintaining access to education is of vital importance for children's protection and development. When schools are safe from attack and other threats, they can provide an important sense of normalcy that is crucial to a child's development and wellbeing, and can also help provide important safety information and services.

**Despite the enormous challenges, it is still possible to deliver education in Syria with the right political will and resources.** Save the Children is currently supporting 53 schools in northern Syria and our experience shows that with appropriate community engagement, robust security analysis, investments that allow adaptations to school infrastructure, teacher training, a flexible approach to delivering learning and appropriate levels of psychosocial support, children can continue to access education. But these interventions require funding, even more so when each new school that Save the Children and its partners support needs extensive rehabilitation and damaged schools have to be made safe again. Education is currently one of the most underfunded sectors of the humanitarian response in Syria. Funding these activities that allow education to continue even under the most difficult circumstances is an investment in the future of Syria's children, and the future of Syria.

## **Recommendations:**

### **End attacks on education in Syria:**

- All parties to the conflict must cease all abuses against children and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to ensure that schools are protected.
- Attacks on schools by all parties to the conflict should be denounced by the UN and member states, and responsible individuals held accountable by the UN Security Council.
- Monitoring and reporting in Syria should be strengthened to ensure more systematic data collection of attacks on schools.
- The UN and the international community should increase efforts to push for an immediate end to the hostilities.

### **Prevent the use of schools by armed forces and groups**

- The illegal use of schools for military purposes should be publically denounced. UN and member states should pressure the Syrian armed forces and armed opposition groups to cease using schools for military purposes and act in accordance with international guidelines.
- Parties to the conflict should be urged to immediately vacate schools that they are currently using, ensure that schools are safe for students to return, and issue orders to commanders not to use school buildings or school property.

### **Support education in Syria**

- Donors must prioritize and fully fund education programming, including investments in alternative options for children to pursue their education if schools remain closed or are unsafe, as well as increasing the numbers of trained teachers.
- Ensure training of teachers in conflict-sensitive approaches to education, including the provision of psychosocial support to students, and how to keep children safe while in school.



“We ran downstairs and we heard the explosion. We knew it had hit the school again because the explosion was very close. It was the second time the school had been hit in a month. I believe that I will never be able to go school again after this. I feel very bad because if I cannot finish school then I will not be able to go to university to become a doctor.” Maha, 10 years old



Photo: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

Rami\*, 9, sits in a classroom behind his desk in a school supported by Save the Children in northern Syria.

- Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
- We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
- We help them fulfil their potential.

[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

