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[Refugee Quilts from Syria and Iraq](#) Inspire American Students



Playground bombing as seen by Amal

Early in 2012, Amal watched, horrified, as a Syrian government helicopter flew low over a playground in the town of Dara'a and unleashed bombs on the children below. After planes bombed Amal's house, almost killing her brother, Amal decided that it was time to leave for the safety of Jordan.

Still haunted by memories of the playground carnage, Amal joined eleven other women refugees last summer to record their experience through embroidery. They worked at the [Collateral Repair Project](#) (CRP), an organization that assists refugees in Amman.

The completed squares were brought to the US by [Allyson Hawkins](#), a student at the Fletcher School (Tufts University) who worked as a Peace

Fellow at CRP in 2016. They were then assembled into [two large advocacy quilts](#) by [Quilters By The Sea](#), a guild in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

The quilts are now helping American students to understand what it means to be a refugee at a time when US policy has turned sharply against refugees. If enacted, President Trump's recent Executive Order would halt all refugee resettlement for four months and reduce the 2017 refugee quota from 110,000 to 50,000. The US took in 12,587 Syrians in 2016.



Sewing squares for the quilts in Amman

The quilts were first shown at a recent event by students at Georgetown University where they were introduced by Rose Twagirumukiza, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide who spent years in refugee camps before being resettled in the US. A week later, the quilts were shown at a weekend of social justice organized by the Hillel association of Jewish students at the University of Maryland.

Palomar, an intern at The Advocacy Project who is managing AP's quilt outreach. "They deserve our respect and friendship." Students have requested the quilts for events at American University, George Washington, Salve Regina, Columbia and Berkeley.

"The quilts tell us that refugees are people of great courage and resilience," said Angelique

The two quilts describe each stage of the refugee's journey, starting with the decision to leave. Wa'ad used her square to recall the night that masked men dressed in black burst into her house and beat her badly. Dhanya fled because she is a Mandaen, from a small Christian sect in Iraq that has been decimated by persecution. Ikhlas's square laments the fate of Iraqi children by showing a book of child rights covered by blood.



Ruth Sears, left, and Allison Wilbur led the quilting in Rhode Island

Several designs depict flight by sea. After she arrived in Jordan, Fakhriaya had planned to find a smuggler to take her and her daughter to Europe, but she changed her mind after hearing of the drownings. Soltana's design shows refugees trying to escape Gaza in a crowded boat.

Salima's square expresses her gratitude towards the Jordanian authorities for providing "hope, safety and freedom." But the refugee's relief is also mixed with regret. Roa'a was studying engineering in Iraq when her parents decided to leave, and her design shows her thinking wistfully of the tools she left behind in Iraq. Refugees are largely forbidden by law from working in Jordan.

The women do not expect to return home soon and have little confidence in the current ceasefire in Syria. "Assad promised us peace but brought bombs" says Nafiza. Her design shows a dove of peace carrying sticks of gelignite.

Several of the refugees have applied for resettlement outside the region but even those lucky enough to be accepted will always remember home. Nafiza's second square shows her heart stretched between Syria and Jordan, with most of it left behind in Syria.



The quilts on show at the University of Maryland

The quilts are meant to communicate and they certainly had an effect on the quilters who assembled them in Rhode Island. Sara Jane Tirpaek could not stop thinking about Roa'a, the young woman who had hoped to be an engineer in Iraq. And she still shudders at Amal's powerful image of the playground bombing: "It just breaks your heart."

Allison Wilbur, who has worked with AP on several other advocacy quilts, agreed and said this was not the time to be shutting the door on refugees in America. "No one is a refugee by

choice," she said. "We should be welcoming people in need like this. Most of (them) turn out to be incredibly hard-working members of our society."

* To exhibit the quilts contact apalomar@advocacynet.org.

* To meet the quilters and view their designs [visit these pages](#).

* See how [Talent Beyond Boundaries](#) places refugees from the Middle East in work.

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