

Patrick Fine: Hi, I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360, and you're listening to *A Deeper Look* Podcast. Welcome to all of our new and returning listeners. If you're a new listener, I invite you to subscribe.

This year we're focusing on humanitarian crisis and emergency response and I've been talking to a wide variety of people who are policymakers, activists or people affected by crisis. Today I have the pleasure of having Saria Samakie, who is a student at Georgetown University, who is from Syria. Sari brings a youth perspective to this topic of humanitarian response and is also a social entrepreneur.

Saria Samakie: Well, first of all, thank you, Patrick, for having me today. I'm very much looking forward to our conversation and I'm very much looking forward to engage with our audience.

Patrick Fine: Saria, what I'd like to hear from you is both a little bit about your experience in Syria, which is a country that has been engulfed in crisis since 2011, how it affected you personally, and then a bit about your journey to where you are today as a student at Georgetown, and to get your perspective on some of the different aspects of the crisis, both social, political and economic.

Why don't we start by you telling us a little bit about yourself?

Saria Samakie: Yeah, so you want to go back to 2011. When I saw the first protests in Dara, in Syria, I was still 14. I remember seeing it on TV and it was on Al-Jazeera, because the Syrian National News they were like, "There's nothing happening. These are a bunch of, you know, terrorists coming in and doing fake demonstrations." And so, seeing it on Al-Jazeera, seeing these people protesting – seeing – and they weren't asking to change the regime at the beginning. You know, this is something that's often forgotten. But really the first six months of the revolution we're asking for change.

Patrick Fine: Right, it's part of the whole Arab Spring movement.

Saria Samakie: Yes. Asking for participating and showing their opinion, showing the policies they want to see happening.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Saria Samakie: And they want to see the public, you know, participating in the political life.

Patrick Fine: And to have some voice.

Saria Samakie: And to have some voice, of course. When you have something like the Arab Spring and you start looking at your neighboring countries and here, for me, especially Egypt. I saw this beautiful demonstrations of over 2 million people taking the streets and really setting forward this motion.

You start asking yourselves questions about the freedoms you have, about the social justice you're engaging in, about the equality you're facing in the country.

These are the type of questions that lead to people going down the streets and voicing their opinions.

Patrick Fine: So, as a 14-year-old who was watching these demonstrations on TV, seeing what was happening in other parts of the Arab world, like Egypt, were you having conversations with your friends, with other 14- and 15- and 16-year-olds?

Saria Samakie: Absolutely. I mean, I remember, in every classroom in Syrian schools there's a picture of Bashar al-Assad and Hafez al-Assad; they're next to each other. We'd make jokes about the regime. Halfway into our laughs we'd put our hand on our mouth and we're like, "Let's stop talking, because you know, black cars are going to come and take us out of nowhere."

We had this metaphor in Syria that said, "The walls have ears, so be careful of what you say." And so, you know, as a 14-year-old, we started having this conversation of what's happening. As a 14-year-old, a 15-year-old, you don't know much about the world yet, but you definitely know that shooting people who are protesting and raising their voice is wrong. That is definite.

And, for me, seeing that these people going into peaceful protests are being shot down, I was like, "There's something going on here. Something wrong." And, and I want to put this into perspective. You know, as the youth, as the young, we really had hopes for the regime. You know, we looked at the President, Bashar al-Assad, and at the time he was educated in England, he was young, he was a doctor. We looked up to him in a way and we thought that he's going to bring the change that his father didn't bring. What we saw

is that he's no different than his father with the brutality that he brought.

Patrick Fine: What city were you in?

Saria Samakie: So, I was in Aleppo, 2012.

Patrick Fine: I see.

Saria Samakie: I finished freshman year in high school, and I couldn't go to school anymore; my school turned into a military base.

Patrick Fine: And what were the students supposed to do?

Saria Samakie: Go to other schools. Or some of them stopped their school as well, same as me, or you go to homeschooling, you know. There're a lot of centers that provided lessons as well.

Patrick Fine: I see.

Saria Samakie: I decided to drop out of school. And so, you really, like, you had to turn to social media. Social media was really the outlet that we used.

Patrick Fine: And which social media did you use?

Saria Samakie: You had Facebook and you had Twitter.

Patrick Fine: What about WhatsApp, did you use that?

Saria Samakie: You know, WhatsApp, WhatsApp was there at the time. It's famous in the Middle East for communication. We mainly did not use it, because we're always afraid of government spying.

Skype was actually what we used to have these political discussions, because Skype was always harder to, uh, kinda ...

Patrick Fine: Monitor?

Saria Samakie: Yeah, monitor. Obviously used proxies as well and so on.

Patrick Fine: Sure, okay.

Saria Samakie: Yeah. So, you turned to Facebook and Twitter and that's where you're really started exposing yourself to other people's ideas and

to really expressing your ideas. But, you know, the government is aware of you doing that and when you become a threat, they come and take you.

Now for me, I picked up my camera as my way of expressing myself. I was seeing streets that I grew up in, I walked in, that are being destroyed. I'm seeing friends that are being captured and killed. Even the school that I went to, to see it go from a place where I had memories with my friend into now a place of torture and capture is very hard to deal with. And so, I took the camera and I started taking pictures as my way of expressing myself and that got me into trouble.

I learned that you're not allowed, actually, to do that, because they thought whoever's taking pictures on the streets, regardless of where you are. I could be, you know, taking a selfie on the street and be accused of working with foreign news agencies.

So, Patrick, when I was in Syria, I was captured three times by three different groups: by the Syrian Intelligence, by the Free Syrian Army and when leaving Aleppo, I was captured by Jabhat al-Nusra and that was only for a couple of hours.

And my fault was, you know, I was in the old city of Aleppo, which is now completely destroyed. After Friday prayer, I got out of the mosque and my cousin and I started taking pictures, mainly of, you know, the street, the minaret, the walls and so – and was captured and accused of supporting terrorism and working with foreign news agencies. And they said, "I'm going to take these pictures and, you know, Photoshop them and put demonstrators in them.

Patrick Fine: I see.

Saria Samakie: Can you imagine how, for the regime how fearful they are of the camera and of a 15-year-old.

This is how desperate they are. You know. That, that says a lot.

Patrick Fine: So, do they detain you, or do they just take your camera away?

Saria Samakie: Oh, no. They detained me, yeah. It was a Friday, I was taken to the military intelligence in Aleppo.

And, you know, to give our listeners here a background about the military intelligence in Syria, really people who go in are dead and people who go out are reborn. That's how we think of it.

And so, going in there and knowing of the people that have gone in there and died and are still dying every day since the beginning of the conflict, I kinda just knew that this could be the end of it.

They take us to the military intelligence and the moment we arrive, we're thrown on the floor and the beating starts. And then we're asked to stand in a room, facing the wall, give in our belongings down to our shoelaces and that's really here where I held my cousin's hand.

And I was, I was like, "It was nice meeting you. We're probably going to die at any moment."

Patrick Fine: What did your dad do when he found out that the military police had picked you up?

Saria Samakie: So, they didn't know where I was.

Patrick Fine: Yeah, you disappeared.

Saria Samakie: I disappeared. I went to Friday prayer, didn't come back. And they called every intelligence center and police station in Aleppo and they all said, "We don't know where they are." They called the one that I was in and they said, "We don't know where he is." Yes.

The only reason I went from that torture room to the investigation room was because they discovered that I hold a Canadian passport. It's a very important point, because I feel like it shows you how you're stripped of your humanity as a Syrian and you're elevated to, you know, you're considered a human, because you could be holding a foreign passport.

As a Syrian who grew up in Syria, I like to joke about this, but I'm only Canadian on paper. You know. My allegiance is towards Syria, my memories are towards Syria, that's my hometown.

Patrick Fine: Yes.

Saria Samakie: To stand there and be looked at by another Syrian who looks at me and is like, "Oh, oh, we apologize. We apologize for hitting you." And they did the same to my cousin, because he holds a British

passport. And they're like, "We apologize to hitting you." And they took us to the investigation room.

"Is this how I'm treated even though I'm one of your ...?" you know ...

Patrick Fine: One of you.

Saria Samakie: One of you.

Patrick Fine: Yeah.

Saria Samakie: Is this how I'm treated? Why do you choose to participate? Why do you choose to participate in the killing of your own people?

Patrick Fine: That's my question, too.

Saria Samakie: At the time I hated it, and I didn't know the answer. However, my reflection on it is that at the end of the day, I am dealing with people who were at the beginning good and then something else caused them to change.

And that's the regime to blame. For me, it's always important to remember the human in others, because if I stripped them out of their humanity it – I'm going to generate this force of hatred, this force of violence.

You know? That's how two people clash. That's why it was important for me to remember the human in them. And try to access it. Try to speak to the human in them.

Patrick Fine: So, you were picked up for taking photographs on the street.

Saria Samakie: Yeah.

Patrick Fine: Then you were released when they realized that you had dual citizenship as a Canadian citizen as well as a Syrian.

Saria Samakie: Yeah. They told me, "If you didn't have the Canadian passport, you would – you wouldn't be out."

And so, going out of that place you really feel that, first of all, you're reborn, you really feel that, and second of all you feel like, "Okay, there I survived this, there is a purpose to why I survived. You know, there is the purpose to fill.

So, a month later, it was me and my dad, and we go to the farm and we're standing next to our land and a pickup full of armed men – I, I think they were five people in it, drives into our farm. They come out of the car, they come to my dad, and they ask him to use our car, to take it. And my dad was like, "This car is registered under my name. If you do anything with it, it will come to me. It will harm me. I can't do that." Immediately they're like, "Take his son." I was standing next to him. And, they took me. They threw me in the back of the pickup. And, my dad was begging them by this point. He was like, "Take my car, take everything you want, just leave my son here." He was begging them. He was crying, and he was a very tough man to cry.

They threw me in the back of the pickup and they set off.

I was taken under the accusation that I worked with the regime and that my dad supports the regime financially, which was false.

I'd come to death so close to the point where I became unafraid of it. And so, when they put that gun to my head and they said, "Confess and we'll let you go and we'll bring your dad and kill him." I took my hand, my right arm, and I put it on the gun and I was telling the guy, "Shoot." Now this is obviously ... you shouldn't do that if anyone points a gun at you. But I wanted to show them that I'm not afraid, and I wanted to show them that my death would be left as a mark on them, to show how those who promise to protect the people killed one of the people.

And I don't want our listeners here to think that I was all heroic and I was going through it, like Dwayne Johnson going through his movies.

Patrick Fine: [laughs]

Saria Samakie: You know, I was really, I was terrified.

Patrick Fine: And how long did they hold you?

Saria Samakie: They held me for 10 days.

Patrick Fine: And was it still in the Aleppo area?

Saria Samakie: I didn't know where I was. You know, I later discovered that I was in towns surrounding Hama. It was south of Aleppo. They, you

know, they told me all sort of things. They told me, “We’re in Lebanon.” They told me, “We’re in Iraq.” They told me ...

Patrick Fine: Were they trying to recruit you to join them?

Saria Samakie: You know, this is a funny situation, but towards the end when they let me out, they offered me a job. They’re like, “You have shown more courage with your words and your action than all of us have shown with our weapons. And therefore, we’d like you to join our communications team and then you can work with us.” And I was like, “I’m sorry, I want to go back home, I want to continue my education.”

Patrick Fine: So, they let you go?

Saria Samakie: They let me go.

I got back to Aleppo. All our businesses were shut down, we couldn’t leave Aleppo, we couldn’t leave our neighborhood, really, and my dad was not that kind of person to just sit at home and do nothing and he’s like, “I’m going to teach you how to make yogurt and sell yogurt.” This is during 2013. I was making around 100-150 buckets of yogurt every day and selling them.

And sitting there, stirring two large pots of milk and kind of reflecting on your life, really allows you to start making decisions. And for me that decision was, I want to continue my education. Because, I want to, you know, participate in the future building of my country. Not that there’s anything wrong with making yogurt and selling yogurt. I loved it and I love yogurt. But when I sat there, I was like, “What, what am I going to offer in the future if I don’t have an education?” What I wanted to expose myself to is different perspectives, different opinions, knowledge and experiences. I stood in front of the mirror and I looked at myself, and I was like, “I want to continue my education and I want to leave Aleppo.” Which I believe is the hardest decision I made.

Patrick Fine: Was there pressure or expectation that you would either join the army of the regime or join the Free Syrian Army? Did you feel that?

Saria Samakie: There was no immediate pressure, but I knew that if I stay in the country for another year, until I hit 17, I could be taken for military service. I actually am wanted in Syria. I have five arrest warrants

under my name in Syria for escaping the military service right now. Yes, and so you have that pressure.

You have that pressure you know, you're going to be taken to the military.

Patrick Fine: Was it difficult to leave Aleppo?

Saria Samakie: It was difficult because of two things. It was difficult because my dad never supported it.

Patrick Fine: He didn't want you to go.

Saria Samakie: He didn't want me to go. So, I had to lie to my dad and tell him that one day when I was supposed to be in the shop making and selling yogurt I was, you know, with my mom and my sister and my niece on my way to Jordan. And that was itself a hard decision for me.

And the second thing, leaving Aleppo wasn't easy, because we had to go through the unofficial borders. And the unofficial borders were controlled, some of them, by the Free Syrian Army, and others were by Jabhat al-Nusra and, for those who haven't heard of Jabhat al-Nusra before, Jabhat al-Nusra is really the – I like to call them the 1.0 version of ISIS.

Patrick Fine: And they're considered the al-Qaeda affiliate.

Saria Samakie: Yeah, they're considered the al-Qaeda affiliates. And so, they're mad crazy as well. I remember when I was walking through their checkpoint, someone from behind me placed their hand on my shoulder and I turned around. They're dressed in black from top to bottom, and they're like, "Come with us."

And, immediately before asking about my name, before asking about what I'm doing, they're like, "Chop off his head." I just start throwing words in Arabic. Because they thought I'm a foreigner, because of how I looked. And I'm like, "No, no, no, no. You know, I'm Syrian, I'm just going to visit family on the other side of your borders, that's it."

And then they threw me in a room and they let me out, like a couple of hours later.

Patrick Fine: When they figured out that you really were Syrian. You're not a threat to them, so they just let you go.

Saria Samakie: They just let me go. And on the Turkish borders ...

Patrick Fine: You went to Turkey?

Saria Samakie: Yes, to Turkey and then from Turkey to Jordan.

Patrick Fine: I see.

Saria Samakie: So, on the Turkish borders, I wasn't allowed entry at first. They're like, "We can't allow a Canadian citizen to enter our borders, unofficially." And I was like, "There's no going back. You don't understand. Like, if I go back I'm dead." And they're – and so I was like, "Please go and call the Canadian embassy."

And they did that and they allowed me entry, and then from Turkey, my family and I went to Jordan.

Patrick Fine: So, you flew to Jordan from Turkey.

Saria Samakie: Yes, we flew to Jordan. I arrive to Jordan and now my family's there, but my family – we're all starting from the bottom.

And I couldn't be a burden on my family, because I can't join a public school in Jordan and all the private schools are expensive. They also rejected me. They're like, "You're going to be 18 years old by the time you join 10th grade, you're going to be crazy. How are we going to manage that?" and they didn't offer any financial aid and assistance.

So, I was like, "I'm going to work." I worked with Oasis500, a tech incubator, as an intern and then I moved to an e-commerce platform, ShopGo, and I worked with them.

Patrick Fine: So, did you have tech skills?

Saria Samakie: Nope. I barely spoke English as well. Just started learning, started learning coding online.

Patrick Fine: So, you, you learned online?

Saria Samakie: Yeah.

Patrick Fine: So, what's your opinion of e-learning? Do you think that's a good tool for, say, refugees? Would that be – you think it's an answer for refugee education?

Saria Samakie: Yes. And let me tell you why.

You know, with e-learning, and I don't want our listeners here to understand me the wrong way. I'm a big supporter of in-class learning. However, we have to admit that we have a problem where good teachers are not going to places where education is needed, where students are in need of education. And, what we have online is a lot of gold material. What we need is a good way of filtering and finding that gold material and giving it to the students. And especially the young refugees in crisis.

When you're a refugee, the first thing that you start thinking about, and especially if you're not living in a refugee camp, is, "How am I going to support my family?" And, so here the price of education becomes expensive.

Going to schools means that one less person is contributing to the family, contributing to the monthly income. And so that's why a lot of kids don't go to school and start working at an early age, regardless of their income.

First of all, a majority of the refugees do have access to smartphones, and once you start exposing yourself to the material, you can kind of start thinking about, "Okay, how can I use this material to help myself, help my community, help my family."

And that's the beauty about e-learning, is that it's there, it's in our phones, we just need to learn how to access it.

So, in Jordan, you know, after working for several months now, I really wanted to start applying to schools. And, eventually what happened is I applied to the school called King's Academy founded by King Abdullah II, based on his experience at Deerfield Academy. I received a scholarship. Keep in mind that I failed the first acceptance test, because I spoke no English. They gave me another chance, they provided me with 50 percent scholarship and I crowdfunded the rest.

Patrick Fine: Through which platform?

Saria Samakie: GoFundMe.

Patrick Fine: Okay.

Saria Samakie: GoFundMe. I made a video, put it up there, was able to raise around \$2,000 the first two days. The goal was \$45,000.

The third day, I received an email from someone who would like to remain anonymous saying, “Saria, I would like to provide you with the amount needed.” And that person really changed the direction of my life. If it wasn’t for him I wouldn’t be here right now.

Patrick Fine: No, you wouldn’t.

So, did you finish at King’s Academy? You went through, you did three years there?

Saria Samakie: Yes.

Patrick Fine: So, and so you got your high school diploma.

Saria Samakie: I got my high school diploma.

Patrick Fine: And is that where you started your nonprofit?

Saria Samakie: I started my nonprofit at King’s Academy with two other friends. Their name is Rami Rustom, and Will Close. One goes to – is a sophomore at MIT and the other is a sophomore at Duke. And we started Fikra 3al Mashi, Idea on the Go, mainly because we were frustrated with how service programs were in our school.

Patrick Fine: What kind of service programs do you mean?

Saria Samakie: Service programs in terms of bringing underprivileged kids into our school, a boarding school.

Patrick Fine: Yes.

Saria Samakie: An American installation, a haven, playing with them for an hour or so and then sending them back.

Patrick Fine: Yeah, I see.

Saria Samakie: So here, um, the first thing that we said and thought about is we’re really harming these students more than we’re helping them,

because we're bringing them to our safe haven, we're playing [with] them for a while, no impact, no sustainability, no long-term thinking and we're sending them back.

So, these students are experiencing a lot of mixed emotions. So, what we set out to do is take the concept that we're learning in our classroom and kinda simplified them and provide them for urban refugees.

And the reason why, you know, I want to keep our listeners attention here by saying, the reason why we decided urban refugees is because a lot of people hear of refugee camps, but in Jordan, according to the UN, 20 percent of them are living in refugee camps. The 80 percent is in urban areas. Urban refugees.

And urban refugees have no access to education, health care or basic life necessities and they depend mainly on private NGOs for these three elements. And so, we wanted to work with urban refugees. And, the first idea was to bring a bus, transform it into a mobile classroom, go set up in the streets and start working with children.

That didn't work, because, first of all, streets are very crowded in Jordan, and we're all high school students, none of us can drive, and we don't have enough money to transform a bus into a moving classroom.

So, we're like, "Okay, another way we could go around this is partner up with local NGOs who are working with urban refugees, get access to the list of students they work with. And then bring these students under no selection process for three-month programs and apply what Professor Sugata Mitra applies with in his SOLE method. Which is the Self Organized Learning Environment. And Self Organized Learning Environment is this concept of question-based learning. The teacher would write a question, for example, "Where is Italy?" and the students, every group of students, would receive a laptop, access to internet, and would start researching.

Now we saw that, first of all, there's a gap of English. You know, the students that we're working with don't speak English, been out of school for multiple, multiple number of years, so we're like, "Let's start with introducing the students to the English needed to survive on the internet."

So, we started giving them basic understanding of Google Translate, Google Research. Wikipedia, when not to use Wikipedia.

Patrick Fine: And you started that your first year in high school?

Saria Samakie: My first year in high school.

Patrick Fine: And, and it's still going?

Saria Samakie: It's still going to this day. Yeah, still going to this day.

Patrick Fine: And how many students have gone through it?

Saria Samakie: We've worked with, over 350 students so far and the reason, you know, even though we've been there for multiple years now, almost three years. The reason why our numbers are small is because at the end of the day, we were high school students going outside school to these urban areas over the weekend, and so we really only had six hours of work every weekend, for three months, for the program.

And so what Fikra 3al Mashi then, what we started, we're like, "We need the objectives of what we want to be teaching." And, that's when we really set off to have a question-based learning, critical thinking, teamwork and love of learning.

The reason why we thought we need love of learning is basically we need to show these students that education does matter at this time.

Patrick Fine: Do you track the students to see what happens to them after they participate in the program?

Saria Samakie: So right now, we are working on exactly that. We're working on creating a platform where not only we track the students that we work with, we're also working on a platform to connect the students we work with.

We're also working on establishing a center in Jordan where all the students that we've worked with receive free access, free transportation, to access this center, work on their projects that they want to work with, and have access to tools and information and the means to really bring the questions that they see in their communities and start working on them.

Patrick Fine: And they're all refugees?

Saria Samakie: Yes.

Patrick Fine: Mostly Syrians?

Saria Samakie: Most –

Patrick Fine: Do you have any Iraqi...?

Saria Samakie: We, we've worked with Iraqi, Palestinian, underprivileged Jordanians and Syrian refugees.

Patrick Fine: Okay.

Saria Samakie: And, I really try to have a mixture in every program we have. Because a classroom is really where you start building the strong bonds of a society. When you create harmony in a classroom, that echoes in the streets. That echoes in the house.

Patrick Fine: And, is there a finishing point where a student would finish the course?

Saria Samakie: Yes. So, the course is around three months long with two sessions every week. Towards the end, each group of students selects a project that they want to work with. They present it and that's really the end, is when the students are capable of standing up there, presenting the project and really addressing the questions they want to answer.

Some of the examples of students we worked with was a group of 40 girls; ages between 16 and 20 years old. It was a mixture of, maybe, Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian and Iraqi.

Patrick Fine: And then what do they do with that education? What's their next step?

Saria Samakie: Their next step is really up to them. How can you take what you just learned, start teaching it to other students that didn't get to the program, and really use it to benefit yourself.

Once I had a student who believed in honor killing as the right thing to do. And that person, when he sat down in a group of four and started discussing his opinion, stood up in front of the class of

35 kids and said, “I apologize, for thinking this was the right thing, because I was wrong.”

And so here you really see the power of discussion and the power that these students are left with.

Patrick Fine: Is that based in Arabic culture?

Saria Samakie: The idea of discussion?

Patrick Fine: Yeah. Talking things out.

Saria Samakie: We have the concept, the Shura concept.

Patrick Fine: The Shura, exactly.

Saria Samakie: The Shura concept, which is –

Patrick Fine: Or council.

Saria Samakie: The council. But we, you know, unfortunately with the regimes that we’ve been exposed to and the way they changed our lives, this concept is rarely used anymore. It’s a really strong and important concept. You know, if you don’t have the space to discuss and to share opinions, then you’re really going to be stuck to regressive opinions and backward ones.

Patrick Fine: So, you’re giving us a great youth perspective on crisis, your own experience, dealing with being arrested, being kidnapped, escaping from the conflict, starting your own NGO that focuses on education for refugees. And, then pursuing your own education, and then winding up at a university in the United States. What’s your vision for the future? What do you want to do and will it continue to involve Syria and the Arabic world?

Saria Samakie: Yes. The reason why I want to go back to the Middle East and work there is because I believe I owe something to that region. And I believe as someone from there, from that culture, from that history; it is not right of me to come and receive an elite-level education and not go back and share it with my community. That would be the wrong thing of me to do. And that is just simply how I believe.

Patrick Fine: So, as a young Syrian when you see the situation in your country, cities destroyed, Aleppo particularly hard hit, the use of chemical

weapons on civilians and that conflict is continuing. What kind of outcome do you see there? How is that conflict going to resolve?

Saria Samakie:

First of all, I'm not a political expert, but what I can tell you is when we see an international community that is sitting, witnessing the death and massacres in the 21st century where we show off about how amazing our age in comparison to the ages that have come before it. And when no one does anything about it you really start thinking about, "Okay, who's going to move? Who's going to move this?"

And I would like to echo this – as I'm sitting in the United States, to the United States – we really have to put our political interest on the side when it comes to a situation at this scale.

Patrick Fine:

In terms of humanitarian response.

Saria Samakie:

In terms of humanitarian response. Not a lot of people are saying it, but you can clearly see that Syria is being used as a proxy war between the United States and Russia and the big powers. Not a lot of people saying it, you know.

Patrick Fine:

And now Turkey is in there as well.

Saria Samakie:

And now Turkey is in there.

And, you know, when we hear the news about all these movements from Turkey, from the United States, from Russia, we can forget the humanitarian suffering, and we start focusing on the political atmosphere.

But no, we must start, first of all, focusing on the humanitarian suffering and then move to the political solution.

Because at the end of the day without these people, Syria doesn't exist. Syria is not the land, Syria is the people. Without the people, then say goodbye to Syria, and I don't want to be saying goodbye to Syria.

Patrick Fine:

Thank you very much for sharing your perspective with us. It's clear that you're not saying goodbye to Syria, that you're going to continue your work through the organization, Fikra 3al Mash'i, that you've set up through the work you're doing to educate and to help other people who are caught in refugee situations, through the commitment that you have to the region.

I really appreciate the honest way you've been able to share this perspective with us today.

Saria Samakie: Thank you so much, Patrick. I want to thank FHI 360. But, you know, before saying goodbye to our listeners here, I really want to leave you all with one message in that people will never remember you for what you did to yourselves, but will always remember you for what you did to others.

Patrick Fine: Yeah, that's a beautiful message. Saria, thank you.

Saria, thank you so much and thank you to our listeners. You've just heard an extraordinary conversation with an extraordinary young man. I'd be very interested in having your comments about Saria's reflections on his experience and on what's happening in Syria and the Middle East.

You can send your comments on SoundCloud or iTunes, and leave us a review.

You can listen to previous episodes of *A Deeper Look* both from this season and last season and stay tuned throughout this year. We'll be talking about humanitarian response in emergency situations.