



CHANGEMAKERS: TURNING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

“Changemakers” is a women’s rights group that was established in northwest Syria in 2014, in response to the refugee crisis in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict. Following the earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern and western Syria on 6 February 2023, “Changemakers” shifted to crisis response mode with support from Doria’s emergency grant. The group has so far provided psychosocial support and other forms of aid for more than 100 women and 5 volunteer teams impacted by the earthquake.

It requires resilience to survive a crisis; but it takes a unique level of courage and commitment to create change amidst a pile of crises and rubble. Bringing hope and possibility to Syrian women in northwest Syria, the majority of whom are refugees uprooted from their homes and enduring all kinds of loss, grief and hardship, “Changemakers” certainly set their bar high, and reached it.

“From the start, we wanted to change the negative behaviours that impact women of all backgrounds and on all levels, social, cultural and political. These are big challenges that we can only overcome if we make women’s voices heard”, says Suad, the founder and director of “Changemakers”.

For Suad, one of the main motives was the societal denial of violence against women, predominantly seen as part of “culture and traditions”. “I saw women struggling in refugee camps, enduring the impact of war, crises and exploitation by all parties to the conflict. I pledged to work hard with other organizations and groups until we reach a radical solution”, she explains.



Suad has many inspiring stories to tell about women who – against all odds – changed their destinies and created better lives for them and their loved ones. Here she shares with us Ula’s story: “Ula is a twenty-year-old mother of three whose husband was detained in Syria in 2013 and is still in jail. She is technically a single mother. She joined “Changemakers” training center to learn seam stressing and generate income for her family. She excelled at it and became a trainer herself! But she didn’t stop there, Ula then continued her secondary education and enrolled in English language classes where she also excelled, before taking monitoring and evaluation workshops too! She is an unstoppable force.”

When asked whether she would stop working if her husband were to be released from detention, Ula answers, “there is no way I’m going back!”. Witnessing these life-changing moments of strength and determination motivate Suad and her team to continue creating employment and education opportunities and providing much-needed psychosocial support for women and volunteers, especially following the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquake which devastated their region.

When Suad and her team first started, their project – then named “Kafranbel’s Jasmine” - was sponsored by the “local council” in the area; a group of men with patriarchal mindsets. “They marginalized us and looked down at our work, and when the project term ended, they took away the sewing machines and the generator to turn our atelier into a profit-making factory”, Suad says. Back then, the men literally told them, “you women belong at home”. Being the changemakers that they are, Suad and her team were as far as possible from giving up. They collected tiny donations from one another to cover their basic operations, such as the office rental, internet and generator costs. They were ready to launch a new beginning. “First thing we did was change our name from “Kafranbel’s Jasmine” to “Changemakers”, and here we are”, Suad proudly says.

