

What Is the Syrian Refugee Crisis All About?

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For the past four years, Syria has been in a civil war that has forced 11 million people— half the country's pre-crisis population—to flee their homes. About 7.6 million Syrians have been internally displaced within the country and 4 million have fled Syria for other countries. The result is one of the largest forced migrations since World War Two.

If this has been going on for years, why is this now in the news?

Last week the images of the lifeless body of a 3-year-old Syrian refugee captured the attention of both global news sources media. The child had drowned after the 15-foot boat ferrying him from the Turkish beach resort to Greece capsized.

The images reignited a debate about whether the European Union—and other Western countries—was doing enough to aid refugees from the war-torn country.

How did this all start?

In 2011, during the Middle Eastern protest movement known as the Arab Spring, protesters in Syria demanded the end of Ba'ath Party rule and the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, whose family has held the presidency in the country since 1971. In April 2011, the Syrian Army was sent to quell the protest and soldiers opened fire on demonstrators. After months of military sieges, the protests evolved into an armed rebellion and has spread across the country.

Although the conflict was originally between factions for and against President Assad, the civil war has broadened into a

battle between the country's Sunni majority against the president's Shia Alawite sect. The conflict has drawn in neighboring countries and world powers and lead to the rise of jihadist groups, including Islamic State.

What is the U.S. doing about the refugee crisis?

Since the start of the conflict, the U.S. has admitted 1,500 refugees from Syria. At a press briefing September 10, White House Press Secretary John Earnest told reporters that the Obama administration is making plans to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next budget year. (There is currently cap of 70,000 refugee visas a year that U.S. officials can issue.

I know the country is somewhere in the Middle East, but where exactly is it located?

Syria, which is about the size of North Dakota, is located north of the Arabian Peninsula at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. The country is bordered by Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, Jordan on the south, and Lebanon, Israel, and the Mediterranean on the west. Its biggest cities are Aleppo (population 2,301,570) and Damascus (population 1,711,000).

Isn't Syria one of the lands mentioned in the Bible?

The modern state of Syria is part of the area known throughout history as Greater Syria. In the Bible the city of Damascus is mentioned 67 times. The road to Damascus was the place of Paul's conversion (Acts 9) and Antioch was the city in which the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11:26)

For the original article, visit the Acton Institute.