

## **Global Platform for Syrian Students**

**27 june 2018**

In good time, President Jorge Sampaio decided to establish the "Global Platform for Syrian Students", consolidating Portugal as a host State for the victims of the war, in the vein of our national tradition, committed to upholding the values of humanity, peace and openness to other peoples and cultures.

As recommended by the United Nations, the Portuguese Government has decided to host a significant number of refugees, within the scope of the European Union's resettlement program and beyond it, in a policy which is consistent with our humanistic ideals.

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But in addition to this decision of the Executive, and because this war and the atrocities that we have been witnessing in its context have moved the public opinion worldwide, including the Portuguese civil society, Portugal could not remain indifferent. And President Sampaio heard this deaf appeal of the Portuguese and moved on "from words to deeds".

It is therefore with great conviction that the Ministry of National Defense associated itself, once again, to the Platform, mobilizing the capacities of the Portuguese Armed Forces in your favor. And I must say: what a wonderful group of 53 young women and men you are!

This initiative has an especially important characteristic: the Platform will allow you to continue your education and training at the University level. Thus, Portugal goes far beyond from giving you shelter and removing you from the scene of hostilities.

Our country will ensure that you benefit from the appropriate – from the best - academic, scientific, technological and intellectual education so that to one day, if you so wish, you can return to your country and take an active part in rebuilding it, as a free and enlightened home for the people of Syria.

You win, but we also win: your choice of our country will enrich it, as you will be sharing with us your culture, language, knowledge and youth. The bridges you will build here, by founding lasting relations with the Portuguese, will certainly be amplified and replicated by our research centers, our companies, our public institutions and civil society.

I should like to thank the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, who, from the outset, agreed to this mission, but, in particular, let me mention the contribution of our Air Force that flew to Beirut, with one of our C-130s, to bring you here, and to the Army, that has been hosting you, for the past weeks, while you are learning your first sentences in Portuguese.

Here is the best evidence that our Armed Forces are carrying out real humanitarian missions, both at the national and at the international levels, and constitute a significant instrument of "peace diplomacy". In the past few years, the Air Force has contributed to rescue more than 6 400 migrants in the Mediterranean, in support of Frontex missions. In 2018 alone, it rescued 600 migrants. Also in the Mediterranean, in 2017, our Navy and our Maritime police were responsible for rescuing 1 300 lives.

To our military, my warm-hearted "thank you": this mission ennobles you and confirms the relevance and dignity of your status. To you, dear young students, on behalf of the Portuguese Government, "welcome" ("Ahlaan Bika!") to Portugal, may you be very happy here.

We look forward for the day that the people of Syria can live in peace and harmony. We look forward for the day you have the freedom to choose to go back and help rebuild your country, on the basis of solidarity and mutual respect, as a peaceful and free society, in which people can realise their potential and be open to one another.