

Between January 2015 and September 2016, more than 664,500 REFUGEE & MIGRANT CHILDREN claimed asylum in Europe. This represents around *a third* of all asylum claims registered in Europe during the same period of time.



While the number of sea arrivals during the first nine months of 2016 is 40 per cent lower compared to the same period in 2015, the number of child asylum claims is at least 15 per cent higher – which represents 35,200 children more than 2015.

One third of all child asylum claims in Europe were registered by Syrians, followed by Afghans, Iraqis, Kosovars, and Eritreans. Around 25 per cent of all child asylum claims in Europe in 2015 were registered by unaccompanied and separated children, according to the UASC.

Heartbreaking stories from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kurdistan and more are nothing new. For most news-savvy folks and anyone with a humanitarian interest, Syria in particular has provided us with enough grief-worthy news in the past five years to last us a lifetime.

For many people, ‘compassion fatigue’ has set in – they still care, they are still affected by the devastation the Syrian people have suffered – but they are out of options. They’ve donated, wrung their hands, shared stories on social media, perhaps hosted charity events to raise funds and shed tears. What else can they do? How else can they help?

For many people, Syria is a sadly lost cause – and the only thing that can be done now for anyone with a heart is to lobby their government to accept more refugees.

After awhile, numbers take the place of people – 400,000 deaths are just too numerous to contemplate, especially for people in North America or Europe, who

may have never met a Syrian before.

Certainly for people in the fashion industry, the question becomes even further removed from their day-to-day life.

But for Parsons School of Design graduate Angela Luna, whose name just lends itself to its own brand, fashion is perfectly placed to help the displaced.

The 22-year-old’s designs while at Parsons (one of the top fashion schools in the world, with Tom Ford, Anna Sui, Donna Karan, Narciso Rodriguez, Alexander Wang and more amongst its decorated alumni) were recognised with awards and attention from veteran designers.

Yet as she kept hearing the news out of Syria, her head wasn’t on the off-the-shoulder trend for Spring/Summer ‘16 – it was on how she could help.

Luna, who comes across as bright, sincere and thoughtful, explains, “When my professors and classmates were discussing the latest runway shows, I found myself reflecting on how distant this issue was from our daily lives. How could we be sitting in this classroom, acting as if people are not dying on the other side of the world?”

“I felt this overwhelming sense of empathy and desire to offer whatever I can to help these people,” she said. “But I lived in New York. I studied fashion.”

She was so frustrated at her own helplessness that she considered changing majors, but she was three years into her Bachelor’s degree in Fashion and it was too late to turn back.

So, the enterprising American thought, ▶

A DIFFERENCE
New York-based fashion designer Angela Luna is attracting attention from Greece to Lebanon to the US as she pushes fashion forward into a new era of humanitarianism and compassion.



FASHION VICTIM HERO

What do fashion designers and humanitarians have in common?
More than you might think



DESIGN WITH COMPASSION
Each of ADIFF's designs are unisex and culturally and religiously appropriate for the displaced people of the Middle East. The garments are weather-proof and long-lasting.



► where can fashion help refugees? As the famous saying goes, “If Mohammad will not come to the mountain, the mountain will come to Mohammad.”

“I just knew that I wanted to help and since my skill set was in design and fashion, I had no other choice,” Luna explains.

So she turned her innovative and passionate brain to humanitarian causes. Luna became absolutely determined to do her part, and didn't rest until it was achieved.

Enter ADIFF, Luna's fashion brand with ‘a diff-erence’.

Conceived of over a year ago, the company, which sports the motto, “Design intervention for global issues”, is now ready to launch, Luna tells *La Femme*.

“The brand will be launching sometime in December or January. We are in the process now of moving the capsule collection to be ready for production. This mainly consists of further refining the product and making necessary edits, as well as raising enough capital to move forward.”

So what is ADIFF, and how does it make a difference?

The brand is a social enterprise business, functioning much like Toms, which operates a buy one, donate one model – for every pair of shoes, eye glasses or handbag purchased, one is donated to a person in need worldwide.

That's how Luna's company will function when the full launch happens later this month – though, she admits, “I originally did this project to help refugees, and it wasn't until people told me they wanted to purchase the products that I realised it could be sold and operate as a business as well.”

According to Luna, though the garments are functional and serve a particular purpose, they are also aesthetically crafted and relevant to today's fashion market. The collection is stylish enough to be worn on the streets of Manhattan and practical enough to be worn on a hike in the woods – but most importantly, they were specifically created with the intention of being worn by refugees on their journey to find peace.

One jacket comes with bendable poles that can be inserted inside to create a tent large enough for two people. Another design is specifically made to help a parent carry a baby or toddler without undue strain. Yet another jacket doubles as a sleeping bag.

All the items are waterproof, breathable, quick dry and anti-mould – garments that can keep a person from a war-torn country dry and warm while on a journey to a safe place, or while living in a camp in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey (the three countries which have shown the greatest responsibility toward Syria's displaced populations), where winter temperatures are routinely below freezing and conditions can be snowy.

Dr. Rory Fox, CEO of Edlumino Education Aid, a UK-based charity working in camps throughout Europe, has reviewed Luna's designs for *La Femme* and applauds the research and thoroughness of the designs.

“It's a positive change to see that individuals and organisations beyond the third sector are engaging their skills in both promoting refugee issues and innovation,” says Dr. Fox. “This collection is an example of how creativity can encourage solidarity with refugees through non-traditional means like fashion.”

Yet as if her beautiful career change wasn't good enough, Luna's goal is to have an entirely ethical brand, from inception to operation to delivery.

First of all, she says, “I'm looking into recycled materials that are made from trash into sustainable fabrics. I'll also see if there are any opportunities for innovation in collaborating with MIT.”

Dr. Fox applauds this approach, as arrivals to the camps have very little and secondly, have lost most of their belongings on their journeys.

“Clothing that is durable and warm as the seasons change is vital,” he explains. “Also, as resources for garment care are limited, it's important to keep costs low in case the clothing needs to be discarded.”

Secondly, ADIFF's garments are culturally and sensitively appropriate to those coming from Arab or Muslim countries. “The comfort and modesty of the garments is the absolute priority. For the items that will be for sale, as well as the items to be donated, people will always have the option to cover themselves however they feel is appropriate,” says Luna.

Thirdly, the entire business – from supply chain to employment to production and distribution – will be ethical in intention and practice.

“I'm in conversation with a factory overseas that is known for its ethical ►

“Syria has become the GREAT TRAGEDY of this century.

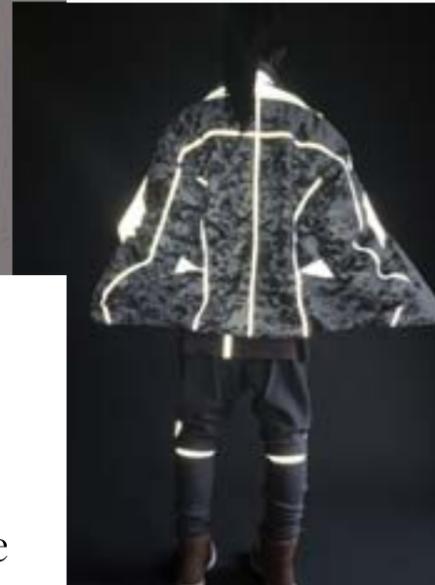
-ANTONIO GUTERRES, UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

“You have to understand that NO ONE puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”

-WARSAN SHIRE, HOME



LIGHT THE WAY
Many refugees have had to travel along dark roads and through countryside and woods with no lights, so some of the the collection pieces feature reflective patches to help with way finding.



“You only run for the BORDER when you see the whole city *running as well.*”

- WARSAN SHIRE, HOME

► and sustainable production methods. I am also working with Manufacture NY, which takes pride in U.S. production and creating a transparent, sustainable global supply chain.”

Lastly and incredibly, the final triumph of Luna’s kingdom is to employ rehomed refugees in every department of the business.

“I plan to create manufacturing that ethically hires resettled refugees, so that the brand is creating long-term solutions for this crisis as well. Within five years, I hope to have refugees employed within all aspects of the brand: in design, finance, planning and marketing,” she elaborates.

This might be the most encouraging part of Luna’s venture. Yes, the first wave of any charity’s work is getting displaced people to safety. But the second wave, which is vital for long-term stability, is permanent rehoming and integration into the new societies where they’ve been welcomed.

“Some of the children and refugee teaching assistants we have taught have dreams of being designers, and we’ve had conversations discussing fashions on different continents, and how many pairs of shoes they have left behind,” says Dr. Fox. Fashion is a common language that makes us all able to smile and engage with photos of happier times.”

Luna is currently visiting refugee camps in Greece to conduct

user testing and get feedback from refugees, as well as meeting potential investors and business partners.

She’s revealed that she has some famous and respected big names and partners, but exactly who is hush-hush until the official partnerships have been announced.

The young designer has presented the brand to Donna Karan, who gave her feedback and presented her with the Parson’s Women’s Wear Design of the Year.

Luna is busy preparing for the imminent launch of ADIFF, so asking her what she’s excited about for the future inevitably gets an involved answer.

“I would love to move the company over to Europe, specifically Germany. The response to the refugee crisis over there has been so much more welcoming and positive,” she says.

Though she’s had interest from major fashion industry leaders when developing the business, humanitarian Angelina Jolie tops her lists of people she’d most like an introduction too.

And despite her target demographic being Arab and Muslim, Luna admits she hasn’t made any connections with business partners in the Middle East. “But,” she says, “I would absolutely love to meet them and do collaborations.”

“Everything comes in time,” she smiles. With the pace Luna moves, that time will undoubtedly be short. www.adiff.com ■

