The conflict in Syria appears on the surface to be a battle between those loyal to President Bashar Al-Assad and those who oppose him. However, reducing the situation to a fight between the ‘good’ masses struggling for freedom against an ‘evil’ government is both simplistic and inaccurate. Al-Assad has been in power since 2000, when he succeeded his father, who had ruled the country for 30 years. The uprising against him began in March 2011 in Deraa, when several demonstrators were killed by security forces while protesting against the arrest of some teenagers who had painted revolutionary slogans on a school wall. This spread to nationwide protests in May, demanding the President’s resignation.

Fighting intensified and the government used military force to crush any opposition. In February 2012 this approach saw tanks sent into Deraa and the city of Homs hit with rockets and mortars, killing 700 people. Also in 2012 the conflict reached the capital of Damascus and the second city of Aleppo. There were numerous bombings, and while officials blame ‘terrorists’ linked to al-Qaeda, the opposition claim security forces planted the bombs to discredit both rebels and peaceful protesters.

According to the UN, 80,000 people have died so far in the conflict, although casualty numbers are difficult to verify as they come from either government or rebel sources both with their own vested interests. 1.6 million Syrian refugees are receiving aid in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, but some 4.25 million people have been displaced in total. The UN recently launched an emergency appeal for $5bn as it warns half the population
will require humanitarian aid by the end of the year. There have been a number of massacres since the conflict began, including one in Houla in May 2012 in which 49 children died. The UN has accused forces loyal to the government of violating international law by targeting civilians. Around 220,000 people have been killed and 12.8 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria. More than 50% of Syria’s population is currently displaced.

Refugees in the region

More than 4 million refugees from Syria (95%) are in just five countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt:

- Lebanon hosts approximately 1.2 million refugees from Syria which amounts to around one in five people in the country
- Jordan hosts about 650,000 refugees from Syria, which amounts to about 10% of the population
- Turkey hosts 1.9 million refugees from Syria, more than any other country worldwide
- Iraq where 3 million people have been internally displaced in the last 18 months hosts 249,463 refugees from Syria
- Egypt hosts 132,375 refugees from Syria

The UN humanitarian appeal for Syrian refugees is just 40% funded. Funding shortages mean that the most vulnerable Syrian refugees in Lebanon receive just $13.50 per month or less than half a dollar a day for food assistance. More than 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan living below the local poverty line.

http://www.euronews.com/2013/06/13/all-you-need-to-know-about-the-syrian-conflict/