Your Excellencies, honored Security Council members, colleagues and friends. Marhaba – Welcome. I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to address you and this great body today.

My name is Subhi Nahas. I am from Idlib, Syria, a small city of one and a half million residents north of Damascus. I was born to a respected and proud family. I love my country, my culture and my people. I am a refugee and I am gay.

I am here to recount to you what I experienced and witnessed as a gay man in my country. I am also here representing a refugee organization imploring you, as emissaries of conscience, to rally your nations to save my people – those who are trapped in Syria and those who like me have lost everything and have become refugees.

In 2011, at the start of the uprising in Syria, government media launched a campaign accusing all dissidents of being homosexuals. Soon after, authorities waged systematic raids on locales where gay people met. Many were arrested and tortured. Some were never heard from again.

In 2012, I too became a target. Soldiers stopped the bus I was riding to university. They took us to a secluded house where they assaulted us. They noticed my effeminacy and they mocked me, calling me faggot, sissy, and other profanities unworthy of this chamber. I feared that one of them – or all of them -- would rape and kill me. You see, those who condemn us for being different are often the ones who brutalize us sexually. Miraculously, I was released.

I watched in fear as the Al Qaida branch, Jabhat Al Nusra, took Idlib in October 2012. After arresting and torturing one effeminate man, they announced at a mosque that they would cleanse the town of those involved in sodomy. More arrests followed, and many more men were tortured to confess their sins. Some were killed. They and other Islamist groups executed more accused homosexuals that year.

The arrests and executions continued unnoticed by the outside world. Then in 2014, after ISIL took over, it stepped up the violent attacks on suspected LGBTI people, publishing images of their exploits. At the executions, hundreds of townspeople, including children, cheered jubilantly as at a wedding. If a victim did not die after being hurled off a building, the townspeople stoned him to death. This was to be my fate too.

I was terrified to go out. Nor was my home safe, as my father, who suspiciously monitored my every move, had learned I was gay. I bear a scar on my chin as a token of his rage.
Two months later, I seized the chance to escape to Lebanon, where I stayed for six months. I then moved to Hatay, Turkey, where I worked as an interpreter for other Syrians.

Death threats followed me to Turkey. A former school friend from Idlib named Khalil had joined ISIL. He relayed through a mutual friend that he wanted to kill me, aiming to go to paradise. He then called me from inside Turkey threatening that “I would see his face soon.” I was terrified. ISIL operatives circulated freely where I lived, and it was only a matter of time before I would be found and killed. By then I had already been recognized as a refugee by this great body’s Refugee Agency the UNHCR, and was awaiting resettlement to a third country.

Around that time, I found ORAM – Organization for Refuge, Asylum, and Migration, the NGO I represent here today. I am working to build the capacity of governments and refugee agencies to protect vulnerable LGBTI refugees like me. As a refugee and a gay man, I am proud to be assisting LGBTI and other vulnerable refugees. I am especially proud to help train the very refugee agencies which returned my life to me.

A few months ago, I was resettled to the United States, where I continue to work at ORAM. I am proud to be helping others waiting where I waited not long ago.

In the name of all vulnerable refugees, Syrians, LGBTI persons and others terrorized by intolerance, I thank you for your compassion.

ISIL-controlled Syria is increasingly perilous for all minorities, but especially for those whose differences from the rest are reviled – sexual and gender minorities, religious minorities, and those who follow the call to voice their conscience.

I have witnessed with my own eyes the annihilation of civility and humanity as I knew them. For millions of Syrians both in and outside the country, time is running out. For my compatriots who do not conform to gender and sexual norms, the eleventh hour has already passed. They need your help now.

I urge you, representatives of governments of conscience to heed this plea and open your doors to those who'll survive this greatest human disaster of modern times. I implore you to do everything in your power to give sexual and gender minorities and other vulnerable refugees safe haven where they can again know security.