Story Headline: **Yusra Mardini, Syrian refugee swimmer, attempts to qualify for the Olympic Games Rio 2016.**

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**STORY SCRIPT**

Seven months after fleeing the Syrian capital of Damascus, Syrian refugee swimmer Yusra Mardini is hoping to qualify for the Olympic Games Rio 2016.

The 17-year-old, who represented Syria at the short-course World Championships in Turkey in 2012, fled the conflict in her home country along with her sister, Sarah, in August 2015 and now resides in Germany.

As Yusra explains, developing her talent as a swimmer was challenging in Syria. She said: “The war was hard; sometimes we couldn’t train because of the war. Or sometimes you had training but there was a bomb in the swimming pool.

Mardini is hoping to be a part of the Refugee Olympic Athletes (ROA) team – which will be treated at the Games like all the other teams of the 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) – after being created by the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee.

Members of the ROA team must reach specific sporting standards and have official refugee status verified by the United Nations (UN) but will enjoy the same Olympic experience as the other NOCs including its own welcoming ceremony at the Rio 2016 Olympic Village.

With between five and 10 places on the ROA team likely to be available, Yusra is keen to inspire people across the world.

She said: “I think first of all I want to do it for all the people, I want to inspire everyone. When you have a problem in your life it doesn’t mean you have to sit around and cry like babies or something.

The problem was the reason I am here and why I am stronger and I want to reach my goals. So I want to inspire everyone that everyone can do what they believe in their hearts.”

Whilst Yusra continues to work towards Rio 2016 selection, she’s complimentary of the support she’s received from the Olympic Solidarity commission who supports NOCs.
Yusra said: “Actually the Olympic Solidarity is supporting me a lot and in a big way and I think that without their support, I don’t know, I’m not sure that I would be able to make it.”

Olympic Solidarity aims to ensure that athletes with talent have an equal chance of reaching the Games and succeeding in the Olympic arena.

Since the Barcelona Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992, specific financial and technical assistance has been offered to athletes preparing for the Olympic Games in order to make dreams a reality for athletes who without the support from Olympic Solidarity may be unable to compete.

This was highlighted at London 2012 where 1,264 Olympic scholarships were allocated by Olympic Solidarity resulting in 76 medals being awarded and 177 NOCs benefiting from the programme.

Whilst Yusra is hoping to begin her Olympic journey at Rio 2016 and the city’s Olympic Aquatic Centre, her journey to Berlin included several weeks trekking across Europe.

Having travelled to Lebanon and then Turkey, Yusra and several members of her family endured a potentially life-threatening passage to the Greek Island of Lesbos before beginning their travels across numerous European borders before arriving at the German capital.

Soon after arriving in Germany, Yusra was introduced to Wasserfreunde Spandau 04, a swimming club based near her refugee centre, where she’s now aiming for Olympic qualification in a pool which was originally built for the 1936 Olympique Games in Berlin.

Having endured the traumatic experience of fleeing her home country, Yusra has a clear ambition for the future: “I think my target is to qualify for the Olympics and to be an inspiration for everyone.

“I want everyone to stay strong for their goals in life because if you have your goals in front of your eyes you will do everything you can and I think even if I fail I will try again, maybe I will be sad but I will not show it, but I will try again and again until I get it.

“I want to show everybody that it’s hard to arrive at your dreams but it’s not impossible. You can do it; everyone can do it if I can do it, any athlete can do it.”

She is now under the guidance of coach Sven Spannekrebs at Spandau 04 who is impressed by the Syrian swimmer.

“Yusra is really remarkable, she is really good in her mentality she has seen a lot on her way from Syria to Germany and she has really dealt with it really, really well. “She is an inspiration for a lot of people in the club here too, not only for me. There are a lot of people who have heard her story and say wow, look how she is reacting now. It is really good.”