

Islamic Perspectives: Palestinians Exiled in Lebanon

Sabra and Shatila

Today I saw Sabra and Shatila. The present and the past, the massacre and the hope. I saw the graves of the martyrs and the workplace of the heroes of the children.

I saw a hospital today that serves 50,000 displaced human beings. A hospital located in the back alleys of the slums of Shatila. Where doctors service the needs of its residents in an emergency room no larger than my bathroom at home.

A place where hopelessness stands in the halls and the streets, a dark shadow asking where is our justice? A place where mothers have lost their sons and sons have lost their fathers.

I saw a school today, a place where the youth of tomorrow shine in hope of a better future. A place where Muslim Sisters are the Heroes of the day. Carrying on, yes carrying on, teaching and struggling relentlessly so that the little ones can know a better day.

I heard a mother cry today, as she told us her story of the loss of 16 family members. They were massacred by Phalangist militiamen as Israeli soldiers commanded by Ariel Sharon watched on without a care. I heard the story of a sister who saved the life of her brother as journalist watched on. She refused to leave the scene until her brother was freed saying: *"I won't leave without my brother even if it means that you have to kill me here where I stand"*. Her brother released only because newspapermen were watching and recording the scene; while others were trucked away never to be heard from again.

Her thoughts of release, oh sweet release, silently shattered on that tragic night. Shattered on their return home when they found their father felled by an axe to the head by thoughtless killers. Dead at 65, never a threat to anyone, now a threat to no one. Who are the murders? Who are those that watched on without mercy? Who are the displaced ones? Who are the heroes? Who are the terrorists? Watch on Ariel; watch on for the courts in Belgium have declared what you truly are!!!

I met a young Muslim brother today, whose name is Ahmed. Full of life, his eyes glowing radiantly with the ambitions of life. Studying to be a nurse, wanting to be a doctor so that he can serve his abandoned people. Yet prohibited to work, for his is one of 72 professions prohibited to him and to his people. What does such a young man do, where does such brilliance exert itself, in a land where hope is bright yet opportunity extinguished

I saw a ghetto today, which made the ghetto that I grew up in look like paradise. Bullet ridden, marked by the scares of death who lurked the narrow streets and took without question. How can such poverty exist? Why are our Palestinian brothers and sisters of the forgotten ones? Ariel, who are the terrorists, and why are you so blind to who you are and what you have become??

May Allah Subhana Wa'tala Bless the Heroes and the Martyrs
and the Hopes of the Children of Palestine.

Written by Abdul Rauf Campos-Marquetti after a visit to Shatila Refugee Camp, Lebanon, in Jan. 2003 as part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation Interfaith Delegation to Palestine and Israel.