

Borg El-Barajneh

I went to a prison today. A prison that was guarded by a gate keeper who only lets strangers out. Its inhabitants trapped for years within its confines. I went to a concentration camp today. Yes a 21st century concentration camp, where people longing for the right of return live a meager existence based on hope and forgottenness.

“We are a forgotten people. No one remembers us,
no one wants us, no one will let us return”.

I saw muhajiddin today, fighters all. Men and women, fighting the battle of dignity, hope and despair. Where have all the flowers gone? Where have all the children gone? Nowhere, no place, just locked away in this place Borj El-Barajneh.

I am drawn to the youth both here and at home, for they are the future aspirations of our world. I am drawn to help them with the struggle of life and to teach them to walk the Sirat Al Mustaqim. Yet it shatters my heart to see those hollow eyes asking why is this happening to us and where shall we go.

I made a friend today whose name is Muhammed, a friend who offered to play the bagpipe. His eyes bright with hope, and eager to speak to us in the universal language of music. We shared the sounds life as he filled the air with the harmony of the bagpipe and I with the drumbeats of a darabuka. The sounds of music intertwined around us, the stark realities surrounding us forgotten for the moment. A momentary sharing, a shrill cry from the bagpipe asking: “Please do not forget me, please remember me upon your return, for I am not allowed to return”. Do not worry little brother, I will not forget. I will remember you always and the moment when youth reached out and shared its aspirations and dreams. The moment when you cried out: “I am, listen to me. I am a man with dignity and Life. You may imprison me within this place, but I am free”. Yes little brother I will not forget.

I met warriors today, men and women who fight day in and day out for the children, for survival, for their hope of return. . They cry in hope that the world will not forget them or forsake them in this foreign land of Lebanon. Muslim brothers who were touched to learn that I was also there brother in submission to Allah Subhana Wa'tala from the foreign land of America. “Al Hamdulillah” they cried, “a Muslim brother from America coming to see us. Allahu Akbar Mercy does exist, Hope does exist”. I could only turn my head and hold back the tears, and wondered oh humanity where has your mercy and compassion gone?

I meet heroes today, the heroes of hope and of the children. Some locked within these walls for 25 years, only being able to leave for the wonders of the Hajj. Imagine being locked away in a place that you can never call your home, where building materials and supplies to rebuild your home can never enter (except as an illegal act). Where mothers and fathers work for the survival of their children every single day. Where unemployment is 65%, where 72 professions are denied, where at 60 years of age medical care is no longer available. Where your home is a husk of leaking concrete, built for 6000, now holding 19,000.

Who are the forgotten? Who are the remembered? Who are the abandoned?
Will they ever leave for home? Will they ever return?

InshaAllah my brothers and sisters of Palestine pray for us. Pray that when we are asked on the Day of Judgment: “Who are of Borj El-Barajneh”, that we will know who you are, that we remember who you are, and not be punished for what we have not done for you.

Written by Abdul Rauf Campos-Marquetti

After a visit to Borj El-Barajneh Refugee Camp, Lebanon, in Jan. 2003 as part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation Interfaith Delegation to Palestine and Israel