

VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

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Dear Friends,

Voices for Creative Nonviolence rang in the new year with our friends at “Camp Hope: Countdown to Change,” the 19 day vigil that urged President Obama to remain steadfast in advancing a more progressive agenda, both domestic and international.

At the conclusion of Camp Hope, our colleague Brad Lyttle wrote President Obama:

"In regard to the Middle East, I also support the strong leadership that you seem to be trying to express in this foreign policy area. It seems to me that dispatching experienced fact-finders and negotiators to the region is an appropriate first step. However, I am worried by the extent to which you seem to believe that there can be essentially military solutions to several of the conflicts. I do not believe that military solutions can be achieved in regard to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the conflict in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, or conflicts with Pakistan."

The hopefulness of Camp Hope was interrupted with the reality of Israel's military offensive into Gaza and the intensification of the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kathy journeyed with good friends and Voices supporters, Bill Quigley and Audrey Stewart, to Gaza. Included with this newsletter are her reflections on the cost of war in Gaza. Voices helped to organize an occupation of Senator Durbin's office in Chicago seeking action to end Israel's military offensive (for example, including cessation of all U.S. aid to Israel until Israel ended the offensive and opened the borders into Gaza to free and unfettered flow of humanitarian assistance).

Here at Voices we began discussions in earnest of expanding our work to more consistently include opposition to the war in Central Asia. We will join with colleagues from the Iowa Catholic Worker communities and the Nevada Desert Experience in a ten-day vigil at the gates of Creech Air Force Base. Located just outside of Las Vegas, Creech is the nerve center for the war along the Afghanistan – Pakistan border. Air Force pilots stationed at

Creech control the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)—the

Predator and Reaper drones—that are being used with increasing frequency in that war. The U.S. military calls the MQ-9 Reaper a “hunter-killer” UAV because it carries laser-guided missiles.

We are heartened by President Obama's decision to withdraw all U.S. combat brigades from Iraq by August 2010. However, after August 2010, his order will leave anywhere from 35,000 to 50,000 U.S. troops in Iraq through the end of 2011 to engage in so-called “counter-terrorist” action, protection of U.S. diplomatic personnel and to train the Iraqi military and police. We must work to end the U.S. military presence in and action against Iraq.

We are also mindful that, even as President Obama announced that 12,000 troops will be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of this year, another 17,000 troops are being deployed to Afghanistan to fight in that war—with the likelihood being that the troop levels will increase even more in that war.

We must organize nonviolent resistance to completely end the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Each day, we are also reminded of the immense toll U.S. war policies continue to take upon ordinary Iraqi citizens—whether they remain in Iraq, have fled to a neighboring country, or have been able to come to the United States. Our colleague Laurie Hasbrook works as a volunteer with Iraqi refugees living in Chicago. Cathy Breen from Mary House Catholic Worker will be traveling to Jordan and Syria to live amongst Iraqi refugees and offer some measure of assistance in the region. Gerald Paoli, who works full time in the Chicago office, will travel to the predominantly Kurdish region of Iraq this May with hopes of extending his time of service in Syria or Jordan, to continue our goals of gaining as much knowledge of the complexity of the situation of the Iraqi people as we can, while simultaneously offering assistance and solidarity.

We value your essential support as we continue our collective work to end war. As Voices expands its work to more concretely challenge the war in Central Asia, we ask whether you might be able to make a small financial donation to Voices. Many of you are regular contributors (financial and otherwise) to our work. Nearly 8000 people receive our newsletter and we ask whether each person receiving this newsletter might consider contributing \$1 or \$5 or \$10 to our work.

We hesitate to ask explicitly for financial support. We recognize that our country is now in an economic depression, the first since the depression of 1981-82 (odd how depressions know no party bounds), and that it will likely get quite a bit worse before it begins to get better. And yet we are hopeful that our work merits your support in these tough times.

As always, thank you for your continued support as we work together to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

In Solidarity,
Kathy Kelly, Gerald Paoli, Joshua Brollier, Anne Poler, Bob Ablanap, Jeff Leys, Dan Pearson, John Volkening



Report From Gaza
By Kathy Kelly
Photos by Audrey Stewart

Since returning from a brief visit in Gaza, (January 16 – January 23, 2009), meetings with concerned groups of people in the United States have helped me remember Gazans, most of whom remain trapped by ongoing border closures and vulnerable to continued bombing.

Within seconds upon return to the U.S. I grew accustomed to instant access to electricity, clean water, and transportation. Here, I can hear a plane approaching without bracing for a huge bomb to fall.

During the first night that we spent in Gaza, a bomb fell once every eleven minutes, beginning at 11:30 p.m. until 1:00 p.m. and again from 3:00 a.m. – 6:00 a.m.

For those who had endured 22 days of steady bombing, this was like slow motion compared to the ferocity of the initial surprise attack,

(December 27th, 2008), in which 88 aircraft struck 100 pre-planned targets within 220 seconds.

On January 19th, when it became possible to travel along Gazan roads, a young Gazan friend and two University students accompanied Audrey and me in a cab ride from Rafah to Gaza City. The students were shocked, staggered by the wreckage on either side of the road as we neared the Zaytoun neighborhood. We went to one student's dorm room and helped him retrieve his engineering textbooks and notes that were buried under piles of broken glass and pieces of plaster. Then we visited with a doctor, a general surgeon, from the Shifa'a hospital. He told us how horrible it had been for him and other doctors to team up, trying to save patients in six emergency operating tables, while chaos and pandemonium prevailed as critically injured people were rushed into the emergency room. "Patients were dying at our feet," he said, "and we were seeing wounds of a kind we had never treated before." Neurosurgeons, vascular surgeons and orthopedic surgeons worked as teams, --most of the patients were women and children. The doctors were accustomed to removing shrapnel from patients, but they were treating people whose limbs had been completely amputated by the force of the bomb explosions. It seems the Israelis were using Dense Inert Metal Explosion bombs.

Dr. Abu Shabham then described the effects of White Phosphorous burns. The white phosphorous penetrates deep into the muscle tissue. When doctors tried to treat the burns, removing necrotic tissue, they would find themselves unable to breathe because of the fumes. When the white phosphorous elements are exposed to oxygen, they begin to burn again. Doctors would remove necrotic tissue and



then find that more necrotic tissue had returned. We visited Sabah Abu Halemi, a woman who had not been so badly burned and who could recover at the Gazan burn unit. Her arm, shoulder to wrist, was wrapped many times in a huge bandage. But the suffering that caused her to sob was her memory of what had happened on June 4th, at 4:00 p.m., in her home in the village of Al Atatra, when three tank missiles hit the room where she and her extended family had huddled, hiding from the bombs. The room had no windows, and they thought it would be the safest place to stay. Here is Sabrina Tavernise's description of that day, recorded in the New York Times:

"The bomb, which international weapons experts identified as phosphorous by its fragments, was intended to mask troop movements outside. Instead it breathed its storm of fire and smoke into Sabah Abu Halimah's hallway, releasing flaming chemicals that clung to her husband, baby girl and three other small children, burning them to death." (New York Times, February 3, 2009)

Sabah then recalled that rescuers tried to load her and the surviving family members onto a tractor. But, the tractor driver couldn't stop when Israeli Defense Soldiers (IDF) approached it. Sabah's son told us that the IDF shot at the survivors and their rescuers.

What Sabah couldn't know is that when we went to visit her home we saw on the wall words that the Israeli Defense Forces had written, in Arabic, after they had occupied her house for several days: "From the Israeli military. We're sorry."

I want to believe that the soldiers meant it.

I've seen soldiers in the Jenin Camp show mixed reactions when we entered that camp in April of 2002. Soldiers who had stopped us along the road, assuring us we couldn't enter, had bantered with us, talked about novels, popular music, philosophies, scriptures. They had assured us that there were no women and children in the Jenin Camp. And more

than one had said, "I am not responsible, I'm only doing my job." Upon entering the camp, we helped pull an asthmatic grandmother, terrified and paralyzed from the waist down, from an aperture in a destroyed building. Her family couldn't leave the home for fear that snipers would kill them. I recall this, and also the wreckage and devastation we witnessed when we were in Lebanon, in the summer of 2006, during the Israeli-Hezbollah war. The Operation Cast Lead assaults are part of a continuum of war crimes undergirded by an ideology.

Defying their occupiers, people in Gaza have built tunnels, many tunnels. How else are they to acquire food, fuel, and water while living under a comprehensive state of siege. Yes, it could be that components to build the primitive rockets fired into Israel are transported through the tunnels, perhaps

kalashnikovs and bullets. And, if it's wrong for a superpower to ship weapons that enable Israelis to kill innocent people, it's wrong for any group whatsoever to send weapons to be used against innocent people, possibly children, including those who live in villages like Sderot. 13 Israelis were killed during Operation Cast Lead, three of them soldiers killed by friendly fire.



But, if the U.S. were to build a tunnel to accommodate the weapons it has sent to the Israeli Defense Forces, the tunnel would have to be the size of the Grand Canyon, an eighth wonder of the world. Boeing, Lockheed, Raytheon and Caterpillar have all profited from the obscene buildup of Israel's military; U.S. taxpayers have sent \$17 billion for military purposes in the last ten years. Of the 1,434 Gazans killed in Operation Cast Lead, at least 400 were children. More than 5,303 people were wounded, including 1,606 children. (Palestinian Center for Human Rights report, March 13, 2009)

My young friend has stayed in touch with me since I left. On March 4th, he wrote:

"Bombing all the times here, every day, last night there was many bombs. You know all what we need to be fine to feel like the others, but what to do, this is our life..."

We must work hard, every day, to refute his despairing conclusion: "this is our life."

His question must be our question: What to do?

We encourage you to visit
www.electronicintifada.org for updates and action suggestions.



Shattered Lives, Shattered Country By Gerald Paoli

"If a glass breaks it cannot go back to its original state, you can create another but you cannot have the original back" (Iraqi Proverb)

Even with a recent significant drop in the levels of violence across Iraq, it will be a long time before it will be safe to live in Iraq. Having endured life under dictatorship, United Nations imposed sanctions, United States invasion and now occupation for so long, many Iraqis find it hard to recognize their country as their home.

Iraq is a shattered country, full of shattered lives.

The only thing anyone knows about Iraq's future is its uncertainty.

5 million Iraqis have been forced to relocate, whether inside of Iraq, or into neighboring countries, many with hopes of relocating to even further locations like Europe or the United States. Upon arrival in a second or third country, many struggle with unemployment, substandard housing and inadequate health care. For many Iraqis, returning to Iraq is still too dangerous. But, ironically some wish to return to Iraq because the struggle of being a refugee is too much for them to handle. It is a very complex situation.

Consider, for instance, that men under 35 are rarely ever let out of Iraq, which causes families to be broken up. Another complicating factor is that, in Syria, food is now so scarce that the Syrians are less likely to welcome Iraqi refugees. In addition, some refugees who have made it to the United States are advising their friends not to join them here because the housing is substandard and

families can't subsist on the meager financial aid, which often runs out after four months.

There have been some policy successes stateside. For example the U.S. State Department increased its assistance for Iraqi refugees from \$43 million in 2006 to \$398 million in 2008. And the U.S. State Department has increased the number of Iraqi refugees allowed to resettle here from 200 in 2006 to 13,823 Iraqis in 2008. While these increases seem meager compared to the great need, at least it is movement in the right direction.

Still, all over the world, the backdrop for the Iraqi refugee struggle is fear, hunger, lack of healthcare, separation from relatives, humiliation and feelings of helplessness.

Our own Cathy Breen and Kathy Kelly have been reporting about refugees whom they've assisted in Amman, Jordan. More recently, Cathy Breen's work has led her to Damascus, Syria. Prior to Cathy Breen's travel, Dan Pearson lived in Damascus and became fluent in Arabic after several months living amidst Iraqis who'd fled violence in their home country. During April, May and June of 2009, Cathy Breen will return to Syria and Jordan, continuing to assist in advocacy for Iraqi refugees.

In the U.S., longtime friend and close Voices associate, Laurie Hasbrook, works with a group at Saint Gertrude's parish which is dedicated to forming personal relationships with Iraqi families, not based on material aid but on sweat equity.

Laurie shared this story with me about "Leila and Miryam:"

"Leila is a widow with a two year old daughter, Miryam. She was a journalist and university professor in Baghdad. She worked with international journalists, which may have marked her for kidnapping. The kidnapping, and her subsequent flight to Egypt, where she had no resources or help for herself and child, traumatized her greatly. She is suffering from PTSD, and has developed a seizure disorder, both of which hamper her ability to find work. The U.S. relief agency she was sponsored by is no longer providing cash assistance, and she is two months behind in rent. She receives food stamps, and also stops at a local food/clothing pantry when running low on necessities. She lives in a tiny bedbug infested studio apartment in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood.

"In spite of the many hurdles in her way, Leila has become a support to other refugee families in her building. She distributes clothing to families in need, lets those without a phone use hers, and tries to help newly arrived families 'learn the ropes.' She is taking English classes at a local Community College, and volunteers her time, when feeling up to the long bus ride (and when she has bus fare) at an Islamic community center. Her daughter is enrolled in a free pre-school program, which has been a wonderful experience for precocious Miryam.

"The future remains extremely uncertain for Leila and Miryam. She is increasingly depressed and anxious about the prospect of finding stable, sustaining employment."

One option for Leila, and, sadly, for other Iraqi refugees, who are our very good friends, is to join the U.S. Army. Some see that as their only viable option.

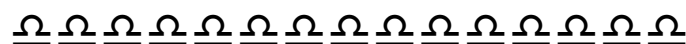
Please help them to avoid this desperate act of enlisting in the very same entity that decimated their homeland, and possibly killed, traumatized or maimed their families.

Some effective ways to aid Iraqi Refugees are:

a) create a local initiative such as the one being developed by Laurie and her co-parishioners at St. Gertrude parish. For more information, in Chicago, please contact Laurie Hasbrook at windlicht58@hotmail.com.

b) act in concert with our trusted partner Direct Aid Iraq www.directaidiraq.org.

c) find the local Non Governmental Agency in your area that assists in refugee resettlement and get involved. Visit <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/> for details.



From Executive Order to Reality By Joshua Brollier

From February 22 to 28, members of Voices joined the struggle to close Guantanamo by participating in the Washington D.C. based "100 Days Campaign." Witness Against Torture's campaign was hospitable, dedicated, well organized, and focused. Daily briefings brought us up to speed on the most current developments. For two hours each day, we stood outside the White House, wearing orange jumpsuits and black cloth masks, while others leafleted and canvassed. Arrangements were made for forums at local churches and universities, and we also visited representative Jan Schakowsky's office to raise our concerns. In many ways, the week was an educational one as much as it was a week of action.



(Photo: Mike Benedetti)

"Oddly enough, President Obama's executive order to shut down Guantanamo took the wind out of the sails of the popular movement to close the infamous United States detention center in Cuba," said Carmen Trotta from Witness Against Torture. President Obama quickly upheld his campaign promise by signing the Executive Order,

giving the detainees, their families, and the community of activists and lawyers that have worked tirelessly to restore habeas corpus a major victory. However, many issues have quickly arisen surrounding the closure process, and the administration has not moved forward with any significant steps to grant justice to the detainees.

At one of the evening forums, we heard from Rebiya Kadeer, president of the Uighur American Association, about the plight of the remaining 17 Uighur detainees being held in Guantanamo. These 17 men belong to a severely persecuted Turkish speaking Muslim minority from the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. We learned that though the men have been held since 2002, the United States government does not consider the Uighur detainees to be enemy combatants or a

threat to United States security. However, the government has declined to release this group of men, claiming that they if they send them to China, they will likely be tortured or even executed. US officials have admitted, since 2002, that they are looking for a third country home for these men. On October 7th, 2008, US District Court Judge Ricardo M. Urbina held that their imprisonment was unlawful and ordered the government to bring all seventeen Uighurs to his courtroom for release into the United States. This ruling was appealed by the Bush administration. Thus far, the Obama administration has renewed the appeal.

In her eloquent appeal for justice, Rebiya Kadeer assured us that a community of over three hundred Uighurs and various social service organizations located in Washington DC have pledged to take in the Uighur detainees. Granting freedom to these mistreated detainees is a necessary first step for the Obama administration. Allowing the Uighurs to remain in the U.S. would also encourage other countries to allow Guantanamo detainees to be resettled into their countries.

Please call the White House comment line at 202.456.1111 and urge President Obama to take action on behalf of the Uighurs being unjustly held at Guantanamo. Also, reassure the president that you will support future efforts to pursue trial and release of the remaining 200 plus detainees in accordance with the existing standards set by international law. One year is too long to wait while due process has been denied to many at Guantanamo for over 5 years, and approximately 40 detainees still remain on hunger strike!

While participating in Witness Against Torture, we were disconcerted to learn that the Obama administration has plans underway that will nearly double the size of the Bagram detention center in Afghanistan. Since 2004, the flow of detainees headed to Guantanamo has been diverted to Bagram, where prisoners have been held as "unlawful combatants." They have been denied their constitutionally guaranteed Habeas Corpus rights and subjected to a number of human rights violations. From our time spent lobbying about Bagram on Capitol Hill, I am only further convinced that we must continue to take strong action to hold our elected officials accountable in the post-Bush political era. We must also work even harder to dispel any myths that seek to export torture into foreign territory beyond our eyes' reach. To quote Mike Benedetti from the 100 Days Campaign, "Torture and indefinite detention are wrong in Guantanamo and they are wrong in Bagram!"

Voices for Creative Non-Violence will continue standing in solidarity, both literally and figuratively, with those wearing orange jumpsuits and black hoods until the lingering War on Terror policies of torture, extraordinary rendition, and unlawful detention are no longer tolerated by the American public and U.S. legislators.



Walk for Peace August 6 – 9

Join Voices for Creative Nonviolence this summer in continuing nonviolent resistance to the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. We also will recommit ourselves to nonviolently resisting preparations for nuclear war sixty-four years after the U.S. used nuclear weapons against the people of Japan.

In collaboration with allies in Wisconsin and Minnesota, we are organizing a walk from Camp Williams to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. The walk will conclude with civil disobedience at Fort McCoy to nonviolently resist the role that installation plays in U.S. wars abroad.

Camp Williams (located in the community of Camp Douglas) is headquarters to the Wisconsin National Guard's 32nd Brigade Combat Team which deployed to Iraq in February of this year. Fort McCoy plays a central role in the training and mobilization of Army National Guard and Army Reserve units from around the U.S. that deploy to the wars in Iraq and Central Asia.

Recalling the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki sixty-four years ago, we will nonviolently resist the use of weapons that include depleted uranium. Weapons with depleted uranium (while not nuclear weapons) create immense health and environmental consequences as the toxic stew of radiation enters human beings and the environment. We recall that in Iraq, the United States used weapons with depleted uranium during both the Gulf War of 1991 and during the invasion of 2003, and that during economic sanctions the survival rate for cancer dropped to zero in Iraq.

Allies engaged in organizing this walk with Voices include: Nukewatch; Winona Catholic Worker; Pledge of Resistance – Madison; Wisconsin Network for Peace & Justice; Mary House Catholic Worker; and Iraq Veterans Against the War – Madison.

Please contact Voices to become involved. Phone: 773-878-3815. Email: info@vcnv.org

Break the Lock

By David Smith-Ferri
Amman, May, 2008

Hiwa speaks

The Americans did not tell us they planned to stay.

They did not tell us they came to build a stadium
to brandish their strength:
an arena where helicopters circle and swoop like
prehistoric birds of prey,
triceratops tanks trample our cities,
warplanes like weather systems hurl lightning from
Iraq's blue skies.
We stiffened as they flung open the doors to our
country
and a steady flow of Western architects, builders,
and machinery entered.

They did not tell us they planned to invite terrorists
into this arena,
that Iraq would be a staging ground for apocalyptic
combat:
on every side the high ideals of honor and sacrifice
fueling the battle,
turning our soil red.

Eleven months later, in early 2004,
waiting in a day labor line at our market in Kirkuk,
we blew on our hands and rocked in our shoes
to keep warm in pre-dawn darkness.
The man who hired us that day
did not tell us we were to work at a US military base
in Tikrit.
And ten hours later, en route home, the car that
eased in front of our van
did not signal it was wired with explosives.

In the molten wreckage,
even the fire leaning over me like a thief lied,
even the flames licking my face and torso
lied to me:
whispering comforting words in my ears,
they lulled me into a coma.
But fifteen days later
I awoke like a newborn, rubbed raw, screaming.
And like a newborn, helpless, dependent, I went
home.

My wife and children hid every mirror in our house.
They would not tell me my face was a charred field,
a sterile moonscape.
Only the scars forming on my arms and hands and
chest spoke the truth.

Only these scars and a mirror I found a year later in
a locked cabinet
when my family left me alone in our house.
I did not tell them I knew their secret,
but O! why had I lived to see this day?
Was it to have my wife leave me,
my children turn their back on me and walk away?

Four years later in Iraq, American helicopters still
wheel and swoop
and military convoys, snaking through our cities,
hiss and rattle their tails.
Their fangs are visible,
but Iraqis are forgotten, locked in a cabinet, hidden
like a secret.
How many of us are incognito, unrecognizable?
How many are defaced, or have severed limbs,
like broken statuary in a ruined garden?
How many of us wear a map of our country on our
face, our body?

If my face must be a mirror of Iraq,
then break the lock
and bring it out of the cabinet.
Let Americans see me,
my shriveled nose and ears where cartilage burned,
how my skin contracted as it heated.
Let American fingers touch the scars.
Let Americans befriend me.
Send their weaponry away,
but let American hands involve themselves in the
reconstructive surgery.

David Smith-Ferri is a poet – activist who
resides in Ukiah, California. He traveled to Iraq
on delegations with Voices in the Wilderness
and to Jordan with Voices for Creative
Nonviolence.

He is the author of [Battlefield Without Borders:
Iraq Poems](#).

All proceeds from the sale of his collection of
poems are donated to Direct Aid Iraq to benefit
Iraqi citizens harmed by the war.

You can order *Battlefield Without Borders* by
sending a check (made payable to MECCS /
DAI) for \$18 (includes postage) to:

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Also, please be sure that Voices has your current apartment number, suite number, etc. Without this, your newsletter may be returned by the post office to Voices as being undeliverable.

If changes need to be made to your address, please let us know via email (info@vcnv.org), phone: 773-878-3815, or mail.

Thanks for your assistance.

AVAILABLE FROM VOICES:

Other Lands Have Dreams: From Baghdad to Pekin Prison, by Kathy Kelly. \$15 (book)

In a Time of Siege: Voices in the Wilderness, Defying Sanctions and War in Iraq, by Peace Productions. \$15. DVD documentary.

Hammered by the Irish, by Harry Browne. (\$15 book). The story of the Pitstop Ploughshares action in Ireland on the eve of the Iraq war.

Witness Against Torture: The Campaign to Shut Down Guantanamo (\$15 book with companion DVD). All proceeds will be forwarded to the Witness Against Torture effort.

To order, please send a check payable to Voices for Creative Nonviolence; 1249 W Argyle St; Chicago, IL 60640.

APRIL 2009