

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

March 2013

Dear Friends,

Shortly after the State of the Union Address in which President Obama announced a 2014 end to the Afghan War, an unnamed NATO official told The New York Times that “there will be a post 2014 mission intended to ensure that the success we’ve had over the past 12 years will continue.” Does continued “success” mean more night raids, targeted killings and aerial bombardment of civilians, leaving behind thousands of special operations forces. Does it mean further polarization of Afghanistan into ever more heavily armed warring camps? The Obama and Bush administrations, assisted by an ever pliant media, have marketed this twelve-year war as a humanitarian effort to “modernize and stabilize” Afghanistan, with last week’s Times characterizing it as “by some measures the most ambitious nation building program ever undertaken.” While think tanks and public relations firms attempt to whitewash ongoing U.S. brutality in Afghanistan, we urge our supporters to contrast these distortions with the voices of those living under occupation in Afghanistan.

Dr. Hakim of the Afghan Peace Volunteers (APVs) recently wrote, “The UN calls the acute malnutrition of nearly one million children in the Afghan south ‘shocking’. Almost three quarters of all Afghans do not have access to safe drinking water.” Transparency International, as he notes, recently cited Afghanistan as one of the three most corrupt countries in the world, with several UN agencies having reported in recent years that Afghanistan is the worst country in the world into which a child can be born. Afghan people burdened by wartime poverty, unemployment and corruption see no signs and little hope of improvement. Yet, for many U.S. military elites and political commentators, a major dilemma concerns how to remove 28 billion dol-

lars’ worth of weapons and other equipment from Afghanistan. Hakim asks us to imagine, --28 billion dollars of infrastructure devoted to death, destruction and maintaining occupation, when the people of Afghanistan still do not have access to food and potable water.

Since 2010, over 50 Voices activists have traveled to Afghanistan to share life with the APVs and bear witness to their ongoing struggles under occupation. The community worked hard and saw many positive efforts bear fruit this year, including the Duvet Project, which collaborated with a local seamstresses’ cooperative to provide over 2,000 quilts to refugee families in acute need of protection from the harsh winter weather. Many of you donated to this effort and your generosity was effective in directly reaching out to those who have been so unjustly displaced by years of warfare and imperialism. This coming year, Voices will continue to maintain our Afghan presence and there are plans for the Duvet Project to resume in the fall.

While Israel’s “Operation Pillar of Cloud” bombardment was still punishing the Gaza Strip, Voices made swift arrangements for Johnny Barber, Kathy Kelly and Joshua Broilier to join people in Gaza and report firsthand on the conflict. The delegation arrived two days after the ceasefire was declared. The team interviewed Gazans who lost loved ones, and they participated in solidarity actions for fishermen and farmers facing harassment from the Israeli Occupation forces.

In the last issue of our newsletter, we published a message from Brian Terrell who was just about to begin a six month federal prison sentence in Yankton, South Dakota, for having protested the United States’ drone warfare in a peaceful action at Whiteman Air Force Base. Through letters and calls he has been letting us

know that he’s in good health and that your support, letters and prayers are very much appreciated. We are eager to welcome him back in May, 2013 when he is scheduled to be released. Please call us if you would like to be a part of the welcoming crew.

Voices activist Cathy Breen plans to again visit Iraq where she will continue building new relationships and reviving friendships from her most recent journey there, in the fall of 2012. We are grateful for her persistent witness and courage in amplifying the personal stories of Iraqi families that much of the media has neglected to tell.

In addition to challenging the broader military-industrial complex, we invite you to join us this year in continued resistance to drone warfare. This February, nine activists were arrested at Hancock Air Base in New York for opposing Reaper drone assaults that international observers continue to classify as war crimes. Protests of this kind are especially relevant as the Obama administration steadily expands the use of armed drones internationally. John Brennan, perhaps the chief architect of the drone and targeted assassination program, has been nominated to head the CIA. Meanwhile, the use of drones for domestic surveillance is rapidly increasing. Please call us if you would like more information on joining or starting an anti-drone demonstration.

As always, we feel thankful for your encouragement and we welcome your input and involvement in our future campaigns. Please let us know of any ways that we can support your community’s efforts to stand for justice, liberty and peace.

Gratefully,
Kathy Kelly, Gerald Paoli,
Buddy Bell, Sean Reynolds,
Brian Terrell, Joshua Broilier,
Tom Heuser, Nicole Heiden

In Kabul, Widows and Orphans Move Up

By Kathy Kelly
January 7, 2012

Kabul —Yesterday, four young Afghan Peace Volunteer members, Zainab, Umalbanin, Abdulhai, and Ali, guided Martha and me along narrow, primitive roads and crumbling stairs, ascending a mountain slope on the outskirts of Kabul. The icy, rutted roads twisted and turned. I asked if we could pause as my heart was hammering and I needed to catch my breath. Looking down, we saw a breathtaking view of Kabul. Above us, women in bright clothing were navigating the treacherous roads with heavy water containers on their heads or shoulders. I marveled at their strength and tenacity. “Yes, they make this trip every morning,” Umalbanin said, as she helped me regain my balance after I had slipped on the ice.

About ten minutes later, we arrived at the home of Khoreb, a widow who helped us realize why so many widows and orphans live in the highest ranges of the mountain. Landlords rent one-room homes at the cheapest rates when they are at this isolating height; many of the homes are poorly constructed and have no pipes for running water. This means the occupants, most often women, must fetch water from the bottom of the hill each and every morning. A year ago, piped water began to reach some of the homes, but that only meant the landlords charged higher rent, so women had to move higher up the mountain for housing they can afford. It only made

their daily water-carrying longer and more arduous.

Khoreb’s home, like that of each family we visited, was neatly kept. She had formerly shared the one-room dwelling with only her daughter. But when the one-room house next door was rendered unlivable by water damage from a storm, the family of eight that lived there had nowhere to go. On Khoreb’s invitation, they now live in her room.

Throughout our visit, she and her daughters cracked open almond nuts, and they didn’t throw away the shells: they saved them to feed them

into a small heater; the nut shells are needed as fuel. They didn’t snack on the almonds; the almonds were shelled for eventual sale in the market place. Cracking and selling almonds is their main source of income. The women have no brothers, sons, or husbands to help them.

None of the families we visited could afford coal or wood to heat their homes. Most of them scavenge for plastic and paper to burn in their small heaters. Overnight, temperatures in Kabul are ranging from the mid-teens to zero degrees. Homes on the mountainside are poorly constructed. The families we visited told us that when it snows overnight, they awake to find piles of snow inside their



Zainab, Umalbanin, Ali, Kathy and Martha going up the mountainside



Duvet delivery

homes. Throughout the winter, they are almost always cold and hungry.

The Afghan Peace Volunteers told the families that they are working together with women tailors (from around their working class neighborhood in Kabul) to produce duvets, heavy blankets stuffed with wool which provide protection against the deadly Afghan winter. Each of 30 seamstresses produces four duvets every two days. Internationals have donated materials and the seamstresses' modest wages, and the duvets are then distributed free of charge to the poor.

The APVs have received many suggestions about families in need. Rather than issue a general invitation for people to come and get duvets, which would likely lead to terrific confusion, they have instead fanned out in teams of two to four, to visit families and learn about their situations. We were on the mountain as one of these teams.

Zainab gently asked Khoreb how she manages to get food. Khoreb tells her

that they don't have enough to eat, but they try to sell as many almonds as possible and sometimes they can wash and iron clothes for their neighbors. Umalbanin met with her aunt on the road, who quickly ushered us into her home and then introduced us to several of her neighbors, all of them women with no husband or breadwinner on whom they could depend.

Yet the community up here seems agreed - we heard it mentioned at some point during each visit - that their greatest need and greatest hope is to somehow give their children an education.

"The main problem for our family is that the children can't go to school," said Fatima, who can afford to send one child to school, but only one. The others have to help support the family. Three of the smaller children work making carpets every day, so that there will be money to feed all of them. "We feel sorry for this, but they must help us find money to buy bread."

My young friend (and APV volunteer)

Abdulhai told me about a family he had visited a few days earlier for the Duvet Project, a family whose 17 year old daughter is his own age. The girl didn't tell Abdulhai that she and her mother were both beggars. The neighbors told him after his visit; with the reestablishment of the opium trade, her father had become a drug addict and has now gone back to Iran. Now the mother and grandmother have nothing and must go to the mosque and other places to beg. "I asked her if she is willing to study," Abdulhai said, "and she told me she wants to be part of classes at the APV home."

The idea of moving up in the world generally means gaining a foothold on a ladder, on a steep upward slope, in some system built on the idea that the terror of poverty and the dream of extreme wealth are all that can motivate people to share their labor and inventiveness with each other. These systems in turn foster the idea that those who already have so much are entitled to get even more. The women I visited today are moving on up; single desperate mothers with children moving up the slope into a cold vacuum, fleeing the streets and daily business of a city that can't feed or use them. Decades of war in Afghanistan has forced these women upward. They don't know how they will ever get back down.

My four young friends, bright and compassionate, who educate themselves daily about the simple, dedicated life - the yearning for, and the laborious struggle for, a better world - are moving on up these mountains to comfort and aid the desperate, the widowed women and their children, who have been abandoned there. They are discovering that the promised land of adulthood, and the corrupt and dangerous city which the U.S./ NATO coalition has done so much to build, is an unequal, violent world they need to resist, step by step.

Gaza's Only Fisherwoman Continues to Sail

By Joshua Brollier
December 26, 2012

"The problems started for me at eighteen," Madleen Kulab said quietly, sitting just meters from the shore of the Mediterranean. "The police and port authorities did not want me to sail as a woman." Though Madleen has emerged from this recent challenge, receiving a permanent permission to fish from the Gazan Interior Ministry, this is not the first hardship she has stared down and overcome in her lifetime.

As Gaza's only professional fisherwoman, Madleen's sailing career began at an early age. Her father, Mahrous Kulab, taught her how to fish from the time she was six years old. "I went with my father from six years to thirteen. Our boat had no engine at that time," she remembered with a certain fondness. At thirteen, Madleen personally made the decision to carry on fishing and support her family when her father's legs were paralyzed from a form of palsy. Her father initially refused to allow her to go alone, but having no other viable means to support the family, he conceded.

While many children were focusing on the usual hassles of homework and finishing primary school, Madleen found it "easy and enjoyable" to sail due to her strong background on the sea. That is not to say that fishing off Gaza's coast has been without the typical dangers associated with maritime work nor the specific challenges that Palestinian fishers face due to the Israeli blockade. There were frightening times, like the instance she fell overboard in rough waters or when the Israeli Navy fired on her with water cannons and live ammunition.

"They had to know who I was and that I was a woman. All the Gazan fishermen are forced to register with Israel so they even had my ID and picture," said Madleen. She has intentionally limited herself to staying within the increas-



Photo Credits: Maher Alaa

ingly shrinking limits of the blockade imposed by the Israeli Navy to avoid troubles, but this has not spared her harassment. She says the prime area to fish is around 11 nautical miles, but the Gazans sometimes experience confrontations with the Navy even within the three nautical miles that Israel says is acceptable. This 3 mile limit was supposedly reopened to 6 after the November 21st, 2012 ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, but Gazan fishermen have had little practical success. Many have been shot, arrested, imprisoned or have had their boats confiscated. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 85% of the Gaza Strip's fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible due to these Israeli military measures.

Though Madleen's fishing crew has grown to include her younger brothers and her little sister, Reem, Madleen is still the primary provider for the family and is also responsible for selling the fish in the market. With approximately 90% of Gazan fishermen living in pov-

erty and the industry rapidly declining, Madleen hopes that she can continue to sail for at least another two years. "If my brothers can take over at that point, fine." Madleen and the Kulab family have attracted considerable international attention due to the uniqueness of their situation. They received a motorized boat as an Eid gift from the Welfare Association for Youth. Additionally, Al Jazeera, BBC and Press TV ran features about Madleen.

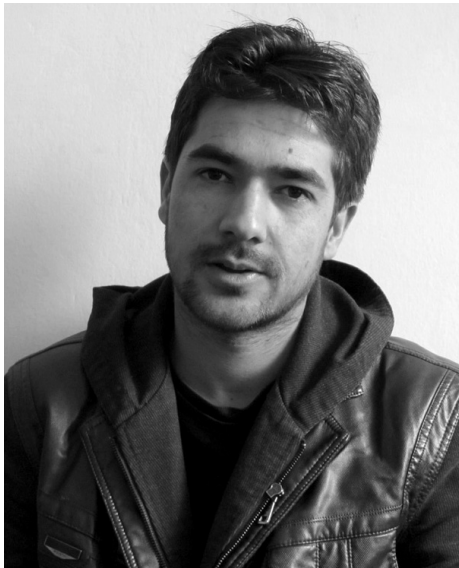
2012 proved to be the most challenging year for Madleen when she crossed the line into official womanhood in the eyes of the law. Her boat was confiscated by Hamas authorities and held for nearly six months. With the assistance of concerned Gazans and human rights organizations, Madleen challenged the impoundment in court and won. She is now the only permitted fisherwomen in Gaza, provided that she does not sail with any other adult males. This makes her work difficult, but she is eager to be on the water again and earning money for her family. When asked about general acceptance from the other fishermen, Madleen replied, "I have no problems with the fishermen. They support me and treat me as a daughter or sister." Without question, she deserves their respect.

Madleen is currently resuming school after taking a year's break to work. She hopes to study sport in college, and she has recently passed an examination by the Civilian Defense Administration for swimming and diving.

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Raz Mohammad speaks out on drones in Afghanistan

Below is a partial transcript of an interview of Raz Mohammad, an Afghan Peace Volunteer, with questions prepared by Maya Evans of Voices for Creative Nonviolence UK.



Raz Mohammad: Salam 'aleikum. I am Raz Mohammad. I'm from Maidan Wardak province and I'm Pashtun.

Maya Evans: Raz Mohammad, what do you think about drones?

Raz Mohammad: I think drones are

not good. I remember how, in my village, a drone attack killed my brother-in-law and four of his friends. It was truly sad. A beautiful life was buried and the sound of crying and sorrow arose from peaceful homes. I say that this is inhumane. Today, the idea of humanity has been forgotten. Why do we spend money like this? Why don't we use an alternative way? The international community says that drones are used to kill the Taliban. This is not true. We should see the truth. Today, it's hard to find the truth and no one listens to the people.

Maya Evans: How have drones impacted Wardak, Afghanistan?

Raz Mohammad: Drones have a negative impact on the lives of the people of Wardak and other provinces in Afghanistan, because drones don't bring peace. They kill human beings. Drones bring nothing but bombs. They burn the lives of the people. People can't move around freely. In the nights, people are afraid. Drones don't improve people's lives, they limit the people's lives. The people are not happy with drones. When they hear the sound of drones, they feel sad. Those who live in Kabul

and those who live in the provinces especially in Pashtun areas feel differently about drones. Those in Kabul don't feel the pain of those in the provinces where there's war and family members are being killed. It is those families of victims who should be asked and whose voices should be heard.

Maya Evans: What do you think about the use of drones after the 2014 withdrawal?

Raz Mohammad: I think that the use of drones today or in 2014 is inappropriate. Why has the international community sent drones to wage war in Afghanistan? Why have we forgotten the concepts of humanity and the love of humanity? War is not a solution. We can see this from the past 30 years of war in Afghanistan. Wars bring killing and enmity. Drones after 2014 will cause enmity between Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazaras because those in government use the people for their own benefit. For their own power and lives, they drop bombs on the people, and bring division and inhumanity. As I see it now and after 2014, innocent human beings will be killed.

The Borders We're Used to Guarding

By Buddy Bell
February 25, 2013

Blue sky looks down on the broad Sonoran desert. It sees miles of electric and razor wire fence, landing sheets from WWII turned up on their side. High-tech sensors mounted on towers and drones survey the landscape. To the east, a virtual armada patrols the Atlantic coast of Florida. Thousands

of people have literally risked life and limb already to reach the barrier, and they will do so again to cross under, over and through, determined to get to one of the two countries to the north

Perhaps close to half are from Honduras, where the two countries barely

squeezed through a governmental overthrow, propping up a regime that would rewrite the constitution to allow their gold mining companies, biofuels and tourism industries to use up the water and appropriate poor people's farmland. In Mexico, Haiti and countless other places, the same results were achieved

using subsidized corn and rice from the United States, exported and sold at a price lower than the cost of production. This made farm life a near impossibility.

Within the U.S., the myth of a civilized justice system has withstood a steep and pernicious rise in the proportion of the population being locked up in prison. The invisible borders that divide skin color, class and gender are the ones that still affect many hundreds of unfriendly judgments made over the course of a lifetime, concerning who gets punished, how much, for what action against whom.

People must repeat and retell these truths to each other time and again.

Everyone has the responsibility to act up against a deranged contradiction: world-traveling goods, unbridled judgment, constrained and isolated people. What would it be like to have friends from across borders? What questions might they pose to us? What excuses could possibly be acceptable for tolerating the policies that make their lives difficult?

A month ago, the Afghan Peace Volunteers started an experiment called "One World in One Week--- We Want to Break All Borders." Even as a generation of Afghan refugees is being expelled from Iran and Pakistan in the renewed flames of nationalism stoked by U.S. sanctions and drone strikes,

the youth in Kabul are reaching out. Reaching out beyond the borders of tribe race and gender in their own community, they started inter-ethnic collective activities including tutoring and a seamstress cooperative. Reaching out to the whole world, they do group skype calls with anyone else who wants to talk about working towards a more inclusive vision of a just and shared future. Sky blue is their symbol, expansive unity that is shared by everyone. Let's take a hint.

Please have your friends from various countries send an email to 1week4abetterworld@gmail.com to get connected with the Afghan youth. There is no deadline.



Uprising Radio

Interview with Kathy Kelly

January 8, 2013 (an excerpt)

Sonali: Welcome to Uprising, Kathy.

Kathy: Well thank you Sonali, it's good to be on your show.

Sonali: the military had been hoping that the US would be allowed to leave behind as many as 20,000 troops... there are Obama administration officials saying that it's likely to be closer to 10,000 and even as low as 3000-6000 troops remaining in Afghanistan... Is the sentiment against troops so high most people want every single soldier gone? Or are they willing to tolerate a few thousand, given that the Afghan National Army is still a very problematic force?

Kathy: I think that the Hazara people who are [the] most discriminated against ethnic grouping in Afghanistan have felt that it's best to keep troops in Kabul and in Afghanistan to protect their interests. They're very very afraid of a resurgent Taliban. And some [others], former Northern Alliance tribes, would also like to see more troops stay. But the Taliban have said, "as long as the troops from the United States and NATO are here, we'll keep fighting."

Out in the countryside, out in a lot of the provinces, there are hundreds ...of families who've experienced night raids, where ... soldiers would burst into their homes, hurl people around, break their belongings, hogtie the householder, take people off to prison

for as long as 6 months. So I would think that there has not been a high level discussion of what this kind of criminal behavior has meant for people in Afghanistan ... the issue of immunity has never been discussed, as best as I can tell, at any meaningful length. And that is the issue of whether or not soldiers, US soldiers or other NATO soldiers who commit crimes in Afghanistan should be punished for those crimes in Afghanistan.

The people are so sick and tired here of war. They've had 3 decades of war; 2 million people have been killed here; 133 children die every single day. And imagine that's over 900 children a week; 100 children froze to death last year in Afghanistan. And people don't

have jobs, they don't have bread. There are many, many millions of people in Afghanistan whose needs haven't been met while the US spends 2 billion dollars per week on its military. If the military presence comes down to about 3000, it seems to me that could be a sign that there may be a lessening of the warfare. There are no guarantees, I mean, this has been a very complicated and difficult situation. But the US people can ask, how much do we want to spend on weapons and warfare, when it's been so futile.

Sonali: One of the issues that comes up when you bring up particularly the Hazara people and other people in Afghanistan who have a memory of the fighting, pre-2001 fighting in Afghanistan... are reports of prisoners being released. Pakistan released a person considered the right hand man of Mullah Omar in a gesture of goodwill that was well received by Afghan government officials, and the Afghan government itself I understand has recently released nearly 100 prisoners from Bagram Air Base in a show of its own sovereignty. And there are some reports saying that peace is in the air in Afghanistan because there's all this talk of reconciliation between the Taliban and Afghan government officials. Are ordinary Afghans wary of this talk of peace?

Kathy: You know, I think we should put in the mix of that question a report that was created I think about 9 months ago by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. It took forensics experts 6 years and many, many scholars quite a long time to put this report together, and it details the crimes of the warlords. By warlords, I mean people who, during the time of the Taliban and previous to that, had gone into villages and slaughtered large numbers of people. And these crimes have all been detailed, they've been proven, and this is a very, very important document. But the problem is that so many of the warlords have cabinet level positions in President Karzai's government. So having some prisoner exchanges on a lower level is, I think, very important but: people know that their own government is filled with people who have got so much blood

on their hands that they actually can force the president not to release this report. One of the warlords said, was asked, "Well, what do you think should be done with the person who was in charge of coordinating this report?" and he said, "He should take 30 bullets in his face." So there are some very desperately cruel people that hold, quite a number of them, cabinet level ministerial jobs in the government here.

And there are also some who are telling their own people, "Start buying arms now. Start training your people to use these arms now." So if peace is in the air, I have to ask, why are so many weapons coming into Afghanistan? Why are so many people encouraging people in their own districts to buy weapons and have more and better weapons? I mean, if those are going to be used in a place like Kabul, it would be very terrible. I mean, you can imagine civil war, and you can also imagine terrible battles breaking out within the provinces.

Sonali: And certainly Afghans remember that kind of thing happening in the early 1990's after the Soviet withdrawal. Even Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the notorious warlord who had at one point been supported by the CIA and then after 9-11 was considered one of the most wanted terrorists in Afghanistan has released a 10-point peace plan, and of course I can imagine a lot of skepticism around that. But there is a conversation happening [that] if the US withdraws its troops, there will be civil war in Afghanistan. Hence, we need the troops to remain. But how has US policy itself...created this situation whereby, after troop withdrawals, it's likely there will be a civil war?

Kathy: Well you know Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani analyst and writer is always pretty astute. Maybe a week ago or so in a Der Spiegel article, he said the US simply doesn't know how to manage a country that they invade and take over. And so, because of the mismanagement, I mean, you can read the SIGAR report [the Special Inspector General's Report on Afghanistan] and see, you know, hundreds of pages chronicling the mistakes that were made: the

corruption, the ways in which the United States occupation failed to create sustainable projects, such that the desperation here would really be alleviated. A lot of money went into the hands of people in the upper levels of government and their families, perhaps, but nothing has been done to significantly relieve the desperation of people in a country where 1 out of every 11 women dies in childbirth, where 1 out of every 5 children doesn't make it beyond the age of 5, where the water still isn't potable, where the electricity often goes out, where people don't have simple means of fuel. They've been burning plastic and garbage to try to heat their homes.

Who has in mind a plan to help them? The US military and the US planners never came up with a strategy so that a sufficient entrepreneurial class ... could really start businesses that would employ people and make things that are useful for people ... And this country needs agricultural restoration - FAO said it would cost 44 billion dollars, but it's do-able - to replenish the flocks and restore the orchards and to be able to clear out the irrigation systems.

One of our youngest here in the Afghan Peace Volunteers was on the phone with Noam Chomsky; I think Chomsky's just beguiled by these kids. And he asked Noam Chomsky, "Prof Noam, what do you think about reparations?" And Noam Chomsky said, "Oh, that's a very important question." He said, "Any civilized country would pay reparations for the suffering caused in Afghanistan." And then he named several countries, and not just the United States: the former Soviet Union, Pakistan. It's certainly, if you just even go to the museum, where the land mines and the cluster bombs and all the land-based weaponry that littered the land are collected and curated, you can see countries all around the world that have made money and profited from war in Afghanistan. Reparations should be paid.

Sonali: Well Kathy Kelly, I want to wish you the best of luck in your ongoing work in Afghanistan, and I want to thank you so much for joining us today.

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Photo Credit: Johnny Barber

Backroom Military Strategy

From an upcoming book by David Smith-Ferri

Sunday, November 17, 2012, Central Gaza: At approximately 20:30, Israeli warplanes attacked a number of civilians who gathered at a plot belonging to Ahmed Salem Bin Saeed, 52, when they heard that one of his relatives was killed. As a result of the attack, Bin Saeed and Hani Abdul Majid Buraieem, 31, were killed, and 6 others were wounded.

— Palestinian Center for Human Rights website

One grief is never enough.
One grief could unify people.
One grief
like a patch on torn clothes
could cover fear
strengthen resistance.
One grief could remind people
who they are
what they have.
But lay one grief on top of another
and they multiply each other.
Build the pile high enough
and the whole community
the whole Gaza strip
will fray
unravel
tear at its seams.