

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

December, 2015

Dear Friends,

During the November Global Days of Listening skype phone call, hosted by the Afghan Peace Volunteers, Dr. Hakim spoke about the 60 million people, worldwide, who have become refugees in order to flee horrendous violence. Thinking of refugees who have fled wars begun by the U.S., whose countries are being devastated while the U.S. military budget grows and grows, we feel all the more compelled to join the Afghan Peace Volunteers in their desire to abolish war.

Some of us first encountered the Afghan Peace Volunteers in 2010, when they were young teens. It's been a privilege to watch their formation, over the years, as they committed themselves to organizing and developing the Duvet Project, the Street Kids School, tree planting and clean-up activities, and other projects aligned with their ideals.

They have had skype conversations with Dr. Erica Chenoweth, co-author of *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, who believes it's crucial to introduce these ideas to children at a young age. Now, several of the APVs teach a class about nonviolence to children at the Street Kids School. Included in their lessons will be descriptions of Okinawan peace activists, recently joined by Hakim and Voices activists Buddy Bell and Maya Evans. Every day, these activists nonviolently protest the establishment of yet another U.S. military base on their island. The APVs will also learn about Japanese students campaigning to maintain their pacifist constitution

We are fortunate, too, to have maintained relationships with people "Voices in the Wilderness" encountered in Iraq when confronting the sanctions that caused so much suffering there in the 1990s. Many who

survived decades of sanctions and war are now living the precarious lives of refugees.

The mounting crisis of refugees crossing the borders of Europe and North America has its roots in the military and economic policies of the United States and its allies. In recent weeks, journalists from *The Intercept* have published documents leaked from a government source that reveal the extent of the cruel and arbitrary violence of assassination by drones. Four Air Force drone veterans are also speaking out, and have written to President Obama, "We came to the realization that the innocent civilians we were killing only fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like ISIS, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantanamo Bay. This administration and its predecessors have built a drone program that is one of the most devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world."

We are privileged to be able to travel and build friendship and solidarity with sisters and brothers in places far away, but we also realize that we have work to do here in our country as well.

We're grateful to supporters whose contributions have enabled us to speak and act and organize with communities here and abroad working for justice and peace. Your donations help Afghan Peace Volunteers to assist some of the neediest families in Kabul and make it possible for us to confront and resist the military industrial complex that has our country in its grip.

With you, we look forward to a time when nonviolence movements will arise and prevail in communities throughout the world.

July 1994: 150 Haitian Boat People Drown AT Sea



"Everyone's Tears Are Salty"

All of us at Voices

Inexcusably, Unspeakably, U.S. War Drones On in Afghanistan



Kathy Kelly

*"To all of you the humble wish
That autumn will be long and mild."*

Toward the end of his life, Primo Levi closed a poem written for his closest friends with this tender line. I thought of it often as I walked between the towns of Savannah and Clyde, in Upstate NY, feeling overwhelmed by autumnal beauty. I was part of the "Undrone Upstate - 2015" walk, a 165-mile journey dedicated to ending drone warfare and educating the public about robotic surveillance and weaponized drone operations in the Upstate New York region. Walkers covered 18 miles each of the days I was able to join them, walking from the Hancock Air National Guard Base, a national hub for the piloting of Reaper drones, to the Niagara Falls Air National Guard Base. Both bases are sites of drone operations, which include remote piloting of drones over Afghanistan. Hancock bills itself as the home of the "174 Attack Wing of NY Air National Guard Base."

Russell Brown, a seasoned peace activist and a veteran of U.S. war in Viet Nam, envisioned the walk and reached out to many groups, inviting advice and participation. He walked the entire route, guiding the members with his friendly, kindly determination. Just before the walk began, he shared with the group his deep disturbance over news of a U.S. airstrike, October 3rd, on a Doctors Without Borders hospital in northern Afghanistan.

The walkers readily agreed to take a slight detour on the walk's first day. Our signs echoed those held by Western activists outside Baghdad hospitals over a decade before: "To Bomb This Site Would Be a War Crime" – a plea that

had gone too many times unheeded. In Syracuse we added "Don't Bomb Afghan Hospitals" by way of explanation. Assembled in front of St. Joseph's Hospital, we distributed fliers remembering the 30 people killed in Kunduz. Thirteen were healthcare workers; three were children. Despite the hospital staff's frantic calls to the U.S. military, the strafing, tightly focused on their building, had continued in six blasts, spaced at 15-minute intervals, from 2:05 a.m. to 3:15 a.m.

Lajos Zoltan Jecs, a surviving nurse, reported his terrifying experience of watching patients as they were burning in their intensive care unit beds. He described his experience of losing beloved colleagues as well:

These are people who had been working hard for months, non-stop for the past week. They had not gone home, they had not seen their families, they had just been working in the hospital to help people... and now they are dead. These people are friends, close friends. I have no words to express this. It is unspeakable.

The hospital, it has been my workplace and home for several months. Yes, it is just a building. But it is so much more than that. It is healthcare for Kunduz. Now it is gone.

What is in my heart since this morning is that this is completely unacceptable. How can this happen? What is the benefit of this? Destroying a hospital and so many lives, for nothing. I cannot find words for this.

I think many people can understand Lajos's affection for colleagues, his pride in hard work. But it's difficult, perhaps impossible to grasp even a fraction of the terror Lajos experienced when the U.S. airstrikes destroyed the Kunduz hospital and killed so many innocents. Nevertheless, we must try with all our might to help others hear his voice and his words, --speaking, walking, and giving witness to the terrible truth about war. The footage collected by drone surveillance will never provide U.S. people with the "intelligence" needed to understand Lajos's shock and lament.

Primo Levi's Autumn poem, written for his friends, reminds us of the beauty we long to preserve. Impelled by both anger and beauty, guided by love, let us speak. And specifically, recognizing the beauty of service so readily embraced by Doctors Without Borders workers, let us speak clearly and strongly to the military planners, the war profiteers, and the public relations smoothies who make excuses for burning people in hospital beds, killing healers, and destroying the Kunduz hospital. Let us tell them we don't want their so-called "security," we feel sickened by their vaunted "protection," we can't afford their endless greed.

The U.S. Ought to Un-Swivel its China Pivot

Buddy Bell

For the last week, I've been walking on a peace march organized by the Nipponzan Myohoji order of Buddhist monks. This march is similar in some ways to another: the Okinawa "Beggars' March" of 1955-1956. At that time, farmers who had been forcefully removed from their fields by U.S. soldiers in the years following World War II acted peacefully to demand the return of their land, which was the source of their entire livelihood.

Some of the farmers had their land stolen at gunpoint. In other cases, U.S. soldiers posing as surveyors duped them into signing English land-transfer documents that were passed off as invoices for the false land surveys.

Although the marchers bravely challenged local stigma against announcing oneself as a beggar, and although it was true that except for the fact that their land was stolen, these people would not need to beg, the U.S. military commander deemed them Communists and dismissed their concerns outright. The military refused to consider the issue of its hostile occupation of otherwise productive land.

The 32 U.S. bases now operating in Okinawa share a foundation in that initial land grab. Together, they comprise 17% of Okinawa prefecture. Nowadays, the Japanese government's habit has been to forcefully borrow people's land at a set rental price; then they let the U.S. military use that land for free.

All of this land area could otherwise be used for the prosperity of local communities in Okinawa. To quote one example, after the return of some land to the Shintoshin district of Naha, Okinawa's capital city, the district's productivity went up by a factor of 32. This is according to the September 19 issue of a local newspaper, Ryukyu Shimpo.

Similarly, the U.S. people would almost certainly enjoy increased productivity and prosperity if the U.S.

government were to downsize its grossly bloated military outlays. With more than 800 bases around the globe and almost a quarter of them situated in either Japan or Korea, the U.S. spends \$10 billion per year trying to maintain a foreign policy of absolute domination rather than amicable relations.

Now that the U.S. has Beijing surrounded by 200 bases lining the East China Sea, it has already caused the beginning of an arms race. For the first time in many years, China is increasing its military budget at the same time the U.S. continues to spend more than China and the next 11 highest-spending countries. Not only is the U.S. depriving its own people of money that could be used to fund

scientific research, healthcare, education, or to return to the people's pockets; it is backing China into a corner where it feels it must do the same. Furthermore, the bases are situated in such a way that the U.S. would have the ability to block sea lanes, which is a hidden message to China that their highly export-driven economy could face the prospect of a serious pinch at a moment's notice.

The proliferation of more and stronger weaponry and the establishment of economic pressure points is putting the two countries on a war path. It becomes ever more likely that a careless action by either side will end up with people killing and dying.

The role of U.S. residents in this situation is not to spend a lot of time criticizing China, a country over which they exercise little control, but to focus instead on altering the course of the United States, which at the end of the day must answer to an organized populace. Chinese government policy will continue to be the main concern of the people who live in China, and the vast majority of them want fairness and security.

Seventy years after occupying Japan in 1945, it is time for the United States to vacate its overseas bases and engage in purely peaceful diplomatic, labor, and trade relations with other countries for the mutual benefit of all people.



To Find a Happy Day

Cathy Breen

When I can't sleep at night I have the bad habit of listening to world news on the radio. This seems to be a family trait that I inherited from my father. The wave of refugees trying to find safety in European countries continues unabated. The numbers are staggering. As someone from the U.S., I am shamed by our lack of response and indifference, as well as our inability to acknowledge our responsibility in unleashing the chaos and violence in the Middle East through our war making.

My thoughts go to the recent perilous journey of a close Iraqi friend (I will call him Mohammed) and his son (whom I will call Omar). Already the survivor of an assassination attempt, this trusted translator, driver, guide and confidant received a death threat on his gate in early August. He fled under cover of the night, taking Omar with him. On that same day, 15 men were kidnapped in his village. He left a wife and six other children.

Having lived with this dear family, I too felt as if I were on the hazardous exhausting, 42-day journey with them.

From Baghdad they fled to Kurdistan. From Kurdistan they went to Turkey. Next, they boarded a boat from Turkey to a Greek island, just miles from the Turkish shore. From there they went to another Greek island, and finally to a third island. Much to their relief, they were at last able to get on a ferry to Athens.

As they pulled away from the third island heading to Athens on a ferry, Mohammed wrote:

"It is very difficult to describe my feelings at this moment. It is a moment I have been waiting for since such a long time, and it should make me happy. But once the ship started to go away in the Mediterranean sea far from the coast, my body became as heavy as the distance became long. Farther and farther from the dearest kids and wife, my body became heavy and tears came down. Everything has a cost in this life, and the cost of freedom is suffering. No gain without pain. One hour later I got control of myself to hide my feelings from Omar who has always kept silent since we have been far from home. He is moving his lips saying something, refusing to share his feelings.

"And we need to be awake for this trip, always a quick response and sometime we have to run fast. Our attempt to cross the sea failed three times in Turkey. If the Turkish police know we are Iraqi citizens they will put us in jail and send us back to Iraq. Two times we escaped from the

Turkish police, but the third time they captured us on Turkish beach. We were held for only six hours and released as Syrians. It seems the Turkish side wants refugees to flee from their land because of economic problem, so the lie that we are Syrians can save our lives.

"But Omar refuses to tell a lie, and I spent much effort to convince him. Fortunately the police didn't ask him since he was very tired when we were captured.

"I wish I could know what he is saying with his moving lips. As we stay on the deck of the ferry, I am afraid from an unexpected act from him, he might jump into the sea. So I ask the guard to let us sleep on downstairs deck. I know that my son is a good Muslim, even better than me, and never think on suicide, but he is still under 18 years and may act strangely. Now he is sleeping in warm and dry place."

From Athens they traveled to Macedonia. Then on to Serbia and then to Hungary. The messages that came were understandably brief: "Now we are on standby at the border...Hopefully we can avoid the Hungarian police." In Hungary the border was indeed blocked by the Hungarian police and they were forced to hide in the forest. From Hungary they managed to cross to Austria. "In need your advice" Mohammed wrote me. "Which country shall I choose? Germany or Finland? The news comes from Germany that huge number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees are there and the procedures for reunion with family may be long." I did not know what to advise him.

From Austria they went on to Germany.

"If I register in Austria then we have to stay here. No other country will accept our case. ..Going to Germany no need for permission from Austrian government. They are happy if any refugee decides to get out from their land... Honestly I only have a little money left...As I write this, I got news that the German police have closed the border and stopped the train from carrying refugees. My idea is to stay at the border until the German authorities allow us to pass through their lands."

Mohammed and Omar made it into Germany and then to Sweden. "Now we are in Sweden...we found a warm place to sleep in a basketball hall. Tomorrow we will try to buy a ticket for the ferry, but everybody says this will be impossible as they will ask for passport. But we will try." They crossed from the Turkish shore to a Greek island in an overcrowded boat. When the Turkish Sea police chased them, everyone was told to throw their bags overboard. Mohammed's passport was in his bag.

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Life Goes On Under the Helicopters

and the Terrible Cost of Avoiding the Dangers of Kabul

Brian Terrell

When I arrived at the Kabul International Airport on November 4, I was unaware that the same day the New York Times published an article, “Life Pulls Back in Afghan Capital, as Danger Rises and Troops Recede.” My friends Abdulhai and Ali, 17 years old, young men I have known since my first visit five years ago, greeted me with smiles and hugs and took my bags. Disregarded by soldiers and police armed with automatic weapons, we caught up on old times as we walked past concrete blast walls, sand bag fortifications, check points and razor wire to the public road and hailed a cab.

The sun was just burning through the clouds after an early morning rain and I had never seen Kabul look so bright and clean. Once past the airport, the high way into the city was bustling with rush hour traffic and commerce. I was unaware until I read the New York Times on line a few days later, that this time I was one of only a few US citizens likely to be on that road. “The American Embassy’s not allowed to move by road anymore,” a senior Western official told the Times, which reported further that “after 14 years of war, of training the Afghan Army and the police, it has become too dangerous to drive the mile and a half from the airport to the embassy.”

Helicopters now ferry employees working with the United States and the international military coalition to and from offices in Kabul we are told. The United States Embassy in Kabul is one of the largest in the world and already a largely self-contained community, its personnel are now even more isolated from Afghan people and institutions than before. “No one else,” other than US and coalition facilities, the Times reports, “has a compound with a landing pad.” While proclaiming its mission there “Operation Resolute Support” for Afghanistan, US officials no longer travel on Afghan streets.

We have no helicopters or landing pads, but the security situation in Kabul is also a concern for Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a grass roots peace and human rights organization that I work with and for our friends in the Kabul-based Afghan Peace Volunteers that I came to visit. I am fortunate with my grey beard and darker complexion to more easily pass for a local and so I can move about a bit more freely on the streets than some other internationals who visit here. Even then, my young friends have me wear a turban when we leave the house.

The security in Kabul does not look so grim to everyone, though. According to an October 29 Newsweek report, the



German government will soon deport most of the Afghan asylum seekers who have entered that country. German interior minister Thomas de Maiziere insists that Afghans should “stay in their country” and that those refugees coming from Kabul especially have no claim for asylum, because Kabul is “considered to be a safe area.” The streets of Kabul that are too dangerous for US Embassy workers to travel in their convoys of Humvees and armored cars escorted by heavily armed private contractors are safe for Afghans to live, work and raise their families, in Herr de Maiziere’s estimation. “Afghans made up more than 20 percent of the 560,000-plus people who have arrived in Europe by sea in 2015, according to the UN Refugee Agency, something de Maziere described as ‘unacceptable.’”

Afghans, especially of the educated middle class, de Maiziere says, “should remain and help build the country up.” Quoted in the New York Times, Hasina Safi, the executive director of the Afghan Women’s Network, a group that works on human rights and gender issues, seems to agree: “It will be very difficult if all the educated people leave,” she said. “These are the people we need in this country; otherwise, who will help the ordinary people?” The same sentiment spoken with stunning courage and moral credibility by a human rights worker in Afghanistan, comes off as a disgraceful and craven obfuscation of responsibility when expressed from a government ministry in Berlin, especially when that government has for 14 years participated in the coalition responsible for much of Afghanistan’s plight.

On the day after my arrival I was privileged to sit in at a meeting of teachers in the Afghan Peace Volunteers’ Street Kids’ School when this subject was discussed. These young

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To Find a Happy Day

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Again and again throughout the journey he thanked me for our prayers, for imploring the guardian angels to protect them. Finally, miraculously, they crossed over to Finland.

As of this writing, more than 500,000 people have crossed into Europe this year. Over 200,000 arrived in September alone, and a million or more are expected before the year's end.

Mohammed and Omar have been given housing at a children's summer camp run by a Finnish Christian group. The nearest town is 12 kilometers away.

"When we arrived here, Omar was expecting to see Finish people and find friends his age. But he found himself in an isolated little village with limited food and fear from angry anti-refugee protesters who might come and invade the camp and threaten his life again...The guard told us to keep the windows closed and keep silent even if the protesters come and break the windows. He remembered the day when the gunmen in Baghdad opened fire on my car. Omar has lost many of his friends and he saw many explosions in front of his eyes. His teacher was killed in front of him, and a few days later he lost his uncle, his grandmother and his two grandfathers. Some of his friends got kidnapped. He has gotten use to life in Iraq, always keeping your sadness inside your heart. But this time his tears betray him as he tosses and turns silently on his bed at night."

And then came this heartwarming message:

"Today is the first happy day for Omar. There is a lake nearby us and one of the staff felt sympathy for my son and was trying to help with his psychological sickness. He gave him a fishing stick and he has started fishing. It is the first time in his life to fish, and everyone is saying he is a very lucky guy. A small fish is his favorite food. He didn't eat fish since we left Baghdad. Yesterday he caught 8 little fish and today he got 14 little fish. This helped to solve the problem of dinner...Miriam (I will call his wife by this name) and kids are OK. Three people were kidnapped last week and Miriam says almost every day she can hear sound of machine guns."

Just yesterday Mohammed wrote:

"Today there was a party in our camp, and the head of the place was there. He is a priest, a very respectful character. By the way they gave us sheep meat. The most significant thing I noticed about the priest was that he stood in line with the people to get his food. Not only that, but at the end of the line behind all the refugees. What a big difference between our society and this society. We need to get back to our humble and modest ways....Miriam and the kids are OK and today they were a little happy because the sky became cloudy and they are eager for rain. They wait for rain and are ready to sing the famous Iraqi song for rain:

'Heavy rain, heavy rain, Fly my hair, fly my hair.' But my girls said that unfortunately the rain didn't come, but somehow they can breathe the Autumn winds....in desert places like Iraq, people like the rains, especially the farmers."

Mohammed's nostalgia comes through in his letters. He calls Finland the "farthest country on the planet." Far from beloved family and homeland, I worry how they will fare as the days in Finland become so short and cold. May we draw courage from Mohammed's words and valiant journey, to embrace our own journey....where ever that might take us.

Added note: Just after the joyful news of the party at the camp, I received this news from Mohammed: "It seems today that the situation is not normal because the police car came outside and are talking to the guards. For two hours now the guards are lighting up the forest trees, patrolling with their own civilian cars, thinking that anti-refugee guys are nearby...what we are afraid is that they will try to set fire to the camp as it happened in Germany. Omar is sleeping, but we will stay awake to rescue our families."

Cathy Breen (newsfromcathy@gmail.com) lives at Maryhouse Catholic Worker in New York City

Life Goes On Under the Helicopters

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women and men, high school and university students themselves, teach the basics of a primary education to children who must work in the streets of Kabul to help support their families. The parents do not pay tuition, but with the support of Voices, are instead allotted a sack of rice and jug of cooking oil each month to compensate for the hours their children are studying.

While the New York Times proclaims that "Life Pulls Back in Afghan Capital," these volunteer teachers are a sign that life goes on, sometimes with startling joy and abundance as I have experienced in recent days, even in this place ravaged by war and want. It was heart breaking, then, to hear these brilliant, resourceful and creative young people who clearly represent Afghanistan's best hope for the future, discuss frankly whether they have a future there at all and whether they should join so many other Afghans seeking sanctuary elsewhere.

The reasons that any of these young people might leave are many and impelling. There is great fear of suicide bombings in Kabul, air raids in the provinces where anyone might be targeted as a combatant by a US drone, fear of getting caught between various combatant forces fighting battles that are not theirs. All have suffered greatly in the wars that began here before they were born. The institutions



Hadissa teaching at the Street Kids' School

charged with the reconstruction of their country are riddled with corruption, from Washington, DC, to Afghan government ministries and NGOs, billions of dollars gone to graft with little to show on the ground. The prospects even for the brightest and most resourceful to pursue an education and then be able to find work in their chosen professions in Afghanistan are not good.

Most of the volunteers admitted that they had given thought to leaving, but even so they expressed a strong sense of responsibility to stay in their country. Some had come to a firm resolution not to leave, others seemed unsure if future developments would allow them to stay. Like young people everywhere, they would love to travel and see the world but in the end their deepest wish is to “remain and help build the country up” if only they are able.

The vast majority of Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans and others risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea in flimsy crafts or by land through hostile territory in hopes to find asylum in Europe would stay home if they could. While these asylum seekers should be given the hospitality and shelter that they have a right to, clearly the answer is not the absorption of millions of refugees into Europe and North America. In the longer term, there is no solution except a restructuring of the global political and economic order to allow all people to live and flourish at home or to freely move if that is their choice. In the shorter term, nothing will stem the massive tide of immigrants short of stopping all military intervention in these countries by the United States and its allies and by Russia.

The November 4 New York Times story ends with a cautionary tale, a warning that “even efforts to avoid the dangers in Kabul come at a terrible cost.” Three weeks before, one of the many helicopters that now fill the skies moving embassy personnel around had a tragic accident. “Trying to land, the pilot clipped the tether anchoring the surveillance blimp that scans for infiltrators in central Kabul as it hovers over the Resolute Support base.” Five coalition members died in the crash, including two Americans. The blimp drifted off with more than a million dollars’ worth of surveillance equipment, ultimately

crashing into, and presumably destroying, an Afghan house.

The efforts of the US, UK and Germany “to avoid the dangers in Kabul” and other places we have destroyed will inevitably “come at a terrible cost.” It cannot be otherwise. We cannot forever keep ourselves safe from the bloody mess we have made of the world by hopping over it from fortified helipad to fortified helipad in helicopter gunships. Millions of refugees flooding our borders might be the smallest price we will have to pay if we continue to try.



SHUT DOWN CREECH!

March 27-April 2, 2016

**at Creech Air Force Base,
Indian Springs, Nevada**

Join Voices for Creative Nonviolence along with CODEPINK, Nevada Desert Experience and Veterans For Peace, March 27-April 2, 2016 at Creech Air Force Base, for a 2nd national mobilization of nonviolent resistance to shut down killer drone operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and everywhere. Last year nearly 150 activists joined us from 20 different states across the country, including over 50 veterans. In a very successful resistance action, we were able to interrupt business as usual for nearly an hour, with 34 activists ultimately arrested. Let's make SHUT DOWN CREECH 2016 an even more powerful stance against illegal drone killing. Please join us, and help spread the word. Together we are PEACE!

Participants who can only join part of the week are urged to participate Wed.-Fri., Mar. 30 - Apr. 1, when we hope to have the largest resistance....mass mobilization.

<http://shutdowncreech.blogspot.com/>



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1249 W Argyle St #2
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December, 2015



Close the Prison at Guantanamo!