

21. ICO Tagung Frauen im Orient

Vortrag Wafa Goussous „Trauma des Krieges bei jungen Frauen“

Respectful Sisters and brothers,

We the Jordanians treasure our friendship with the Austrians.

I appreciate your invitation to speak today.

I come here today to learn and listen to all of you, it's indeed a very enriching gathering and I thank the organizers, ICO and Ms. Kugler for inviting me to be among you, and giving me the chance to raise the voice for the voiceless.

One of the most important pillars that we were taught and still teach, is the deployment of all of our intellectual and theological energy in the service of society and its values, such as the preservation of social justice and spreading a culture of peace, tolerance, harmony and the acceptance of others.

In addition, how to help those in need regardless of their backgrounds religion and beliefs. A better illustration of humanity, mercy and the Christian love is found in the Good Samaritan of the Holy Gospel Luke in Chapter 10.

As an Arab Christian woman, proud to have been born in Jordan, Amman, living half an hour by car from the Baptism site the Jordan River allow to share with you a brief about Jordan my country, Jordan that is bordering with Syria, Iraq and the Holy Land, a Country that has begun its life as a refugee camp since the Palestinian 1948 Nakbeh. Since then Jordan received hundred thousands of Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees and again three years ago Christian Iraqis who flee musol because of ISIS threats, thousands living now in Jordan waiting to be resettled.

Jordan the biblical "land of Refugees" continues to shoulder the whole world its historical role as the safe haven for refugees. The Kingdom prides itself as a unique state of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity with minority groups able to sustain unique differences. Hospitality has always been a feature of the middle -eastern cultures, and we in **Jordan** have always taken this heritage very seriously. Jordan has not been blessed with rich deposits of oil, Gold, water or other natural resources , we are grappling with financial crises , one after the other , and the locals are paying the high price , silently and patiently waiting for the international communities to help out this crises that Jordan now is facing .We **are not afraid to open our borders** to receive refugees from the neighboring countries, neither turn our shoulders from the needy and the ones fleeing a life threatening situation , we are on the contrary so proud of ourselves and our Army (aljaish Al arabi)who stood days and night at the boarder carrying elderly and young children to cross from the no man land to the Jordanian land we paid along with our army high price when The savage murder by Al Kawarij (Isis)of Jordan's hero pilot Muaz Al kassessbeh outraged all Jordanians, and horrified the world.

We, as Arab Christians in Jordan, have found ourselves in the midst of an ocean of uprooted and ethnically cleansed communities, internally and externally displaced, abducted, abused and enslaved. Middle class Christian Iraqi families flee musol to Jordan and had to live in caravans and church halls, it is clear to us and only from past experiences that what we experience now is an image of humanity in its ugliest forms.

As servants for the most vulnerable of those refugees many times we see ourselves helpless as we try to offer a glass of water, a piece of bread for those who are weak, Our work focuses on meeting their needs but food and water are not their only needs, there lies scary facts when faced with the women stories and hidden child abuse. We strongly believe that the Christian moral duty is to be there for them, it is a fundamental aspect of our Christian faith, but believe me the task is difficult. Many refugees they want the food but they don't want strangers to interfere more especially, that many westerns they come as experts and practice programs that offend their traditions and beliefs , and as a result they will not allow their women or children to attend and benefit .

We can talk more on this issue if anyone later is interested.

This is a very sensitive issue , we all must be aware of this fact when entering to serve the displaced people , one must respect their backgrounds and assist them within their suit without letting them feel their weakness and vulnerability , on

the contrary we must only act with total respect, we initiated the food parcel liberty by asking the refugees to choose what food items they want to place in the parcel , we don't want to impose on them even what they eat , as well as offering them a clothes voucher whereby they can go to a shopping department and pick their own clothes contrary to the way many organizations still use by distributing second hand clothes because they are refugees and they forget that being displaced is a disaster in one's life by itself and they ignore to keep their dignity.

while working on the ground, our goal is to concentrate on the vulnerable individuals children and women , therefore , we are able to raise awareness of the human tragedies that we face every day in our service, we advocate for the voiceless at the same time , our work is at the Northern part of Jordan the closest to the Syrian borders , serving the displaced people living in the scattered camps in this desert , scattered around the vast desert lands, crossing small villages and mainly deserted areas. The camps are standing in the outskirts of big farms and located in open air pieces of land, inevitably exposed to the winds, sand storms, heavy rain and heat waves of the area. During our first visit to the camps many Syrian refugee women seems sad so hopeless they do not want smile, and most of them as we were told feel unable to carry out essential activities of their daily life. Syrian women living in Jordan are not only dealing with previous exposure to war-related violence and loss , neither as uprooted from their families home land and homes, but also to their current, extremely stressful social geographic and economic conditions. Today they live in a tent with an outdoor shower and bathroom that they have to walk to, even in the night.

The widespread level of despair among women we felt when meeting them is understandable looking at the environment they settled in , while it is overwhelming or chronic and is unaddressed, stress disrupts every physiological function and contributes significantly to every major psychological and physical disorder, including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, heart disease, cancer, immune disorders, and pain syndromes all Left unaddressed, all this will result in mothers treating their children sometimes in an angry ways because of the anger and the pain they are feeling .

When We started working directly with them , the very first beginning we celebrated mother's day it was very emotional to all of us watching the moms crying when they saw their children singing to them away from home, however, that was the beginning and we were able to start a conversation , the support groups were established through asking them about their needs as women , it was such a disturbing reality to us , not knowing where we must start to meet their physical and mental needs they had literary nothing of what any woman need of the basics, they were forced to leave the Zatari camp by their men which to a certain extent has all the facilities , to live in the desert because those people are tribes and they refuse to live close to other tents and will never allow strange men to see their women , they are all non- Christian communities and have their own rules and regulations , and that was a very serious challenge to us to convince their men to allow their females attend special classes that we planned to implement.

our road was tough for the past five years, trying to break the ice, we opened an unofficial school for their children to teach them theater art, English, and sports to educate them, even hygiene classes and the importance of being clean to avoid illness but also to offer the mothers some time to relax, we succeeded in doing so, and this encouraged us to announce that we are opening a tent for women who are interested to learn wool knitting and embroidery, and to our surprise many accepted to join the class.

The time spent with them helped them open up to us , they needed a listening ear, they needed to feel secure and they needed lots of acceptance and love, the knitting classes were therapeutic to them, they have established a very special relation with their teacher who happens to be an Iraqi Christian refugee living in Amman , also waiting to be resettled which we hired at our offices , Abeer is an amazing teacher and was able to reach the hearts of the Syrian women , it's a very interesting portrait that a Christian Iraqi woman refugee became the teacher to a Muslim Syrian refugee women and bonded in such a way it defies what ISIS tried to spread.

A story

Syrian females were complaining that the needle used for embroidery is too small and our team suggested buying eye glasses, they all refused and their reply came a shock to us, that if their men see them wearing eye glasses they would divorce them or marry a younger woman, stress and insecurity are the title of their daily lives.

Women in this part of the world are always afraid that their men can marry again and leave them as a first wife, they live all their lives behaving based on this fear, we witness this fact every day and we see this fear in their eyes.

The living conditions in the desert is very harsh and tough and the first time we distributed a woman dignity parcel that included everything a women would need in her daily life , the impact was very positive , respecting their female needs and maintaining their dignity gave them a push with all the items to keep them clean and looking good , we even included a facial sun screen to protect them from the direct sun in the desert , here again I say refugee women must be treated like any other woman in the world , it does not give anyone the right to treat them as a second class citizen ,but sadly, many deny this fact when working with refugees.

Our perseverance to continue our work at those camps assisted us to see the reality of the suffering of those women that they go through , their men asked them to work at near by farms to be paid one Jordanian Dinar per hour in addition to their motherly wife responsibilities , this work was to save money to buy clean drinking water as the water in that area is undrinkable, we saw the injustice and we thought we have to end their misery, this year we launched a special request for our partners to step in so we can buy the clean water and place a water filter systems to all the tents , in this way the women will not need to work at the farms and be subject to any abuse.

The ICO were the first to respond to us and thank God to you now the women don't have to work.

The Children's tent is also a very good example of what lies behind those innocent eyes of girls at 12 and 13 years old, Question: would their fathers accept to marry them to lessen the financial burden? maybe yes , but as long as we are getting them engaged in school , feeding them, clothing them , then this possibility lessens automatically and maybe the girls are safe from early marriage.

Our service have been going on since 2003 , serving the displaced , we are proud of the work of the Churches and the commitment to keep up with serving the most vulnerable but our hearts remain sad witnessing all these wars which can only result in more war and violence , and innocent people are paying the actual price , many stories we heard and witnessed are very ugly , you think it can't happen but it's happening in the midst of the twenty first century , injustice and abuse of women and children is happening every day .

Lord Jesus Christ said "Love your neighbor as yourself "

Your best partner in life is your neighbor and your neighbor is not necessarily the family living next door, your neighbor partner in the world is every refugee, uprooted, and displaced child, woman or man, we need to bring the balance back to the world.

We in this room must look for our Young people in the world and make sure to get them inspired and exposed to all these facts so they may get involved and be committed and part and parcel of this mission, to take our seats after us.

Thank you and God bless

Wafa Goussous

Director

Orthodox Initiative

Office of HB Patriarch Theophilos III of the Holy city Jerusalem

Middle East council of Churches

Amman Jordan