

Lezers van de Website,

Deze brief kregen wij van goede vrienden, Amerikanen, Maurine en Bob Tobin die zo'n twee keer per jaar naar Jeruzalem gaan om Witness reizen te organiseren voor Sabeel Jeruzalem. Op deze manier geven zij informatie over de situatie in de Westbank, Gaza en Israël.

Een buitengewoon inspirerend echtpaar dat niet aflat zich in te spannen voor de vrede in het Midden-Oosten.

Helaas was er te weinig tijd voor een Nederlandse vertaling.

Ik geef deze brief van Bob, --zijn vrouw Maurine kreeg geen vergunning om Gaza te bezoeken, -- graag ter lezing aan jullie door.

Marijke Egelie

My Day in Gaza

As I approached my trip to Gaza last week, I tried to prepare myself for what I knew would be difficult to see and hear. My preparation was of no avail. What I saw and heard was far more discouraging and painful than I could have imagined.

I traveled to Gaza with Harry Gunkel, a physician who is working in the West Bank and travels to Gaza to the Al Ahli hospital. Maurine and I were looking forward to visiting the hospital where our friend, Suhaila Tarazi is the director. Alas, Maurine was not issued a permit by the Israeli military for what reasons we still don't know. Maurine and Suhaila are especially close and to deny them a chance of be with each other is just another example of the arbitrary and irrational use of policy and authority that the Israelis employ.

Gaza, as you already know is a disaster. The rubble of 20,000 destroyed or damaged homes is more than discouraging. There are tents outside the rubble where families are living, hoping against hope that there will be some reconstruction before winter. However, no building supplies are being allowed in so the coming months look bleak for thousands of people.

According to the UN, more than 90% of the water of Gaza is contaminated and raw sewage must be pumped directly into the sea making fishing dangerous. The tunnels have recently been bombed again, cutting off the only supplies getting in. I keep asking myself, 'Where is the international outrage? How can good people allow their fellow human beings continue to be slowly murdered? Why does our Congress continue to justify our complicity by ignoring the breach of humanitarian and international law? More than that, we condemn the Goldstone report that simply seeks the truth so that the world can see. I wish I could deny what I have seen with my own eyes, but I can't and I won't.

The upside of my visit was visiting the Al Ahli hospital. I was asked to celebrate the Eucharist for the hospital staff in the hospital chapel which still bears the scars of an Israeli bomb that damaged the roof and struck next to the altar. The dozen or so Christians there were most responsive as several Muslim hospital patients observed through the door. It was a very moving experience for me as I tried to speak to their situation with some element of hope. All I could say in the final analysis is that there are many in the U.S. who care and try to work for their release as prisoners of the brutal occupation and blockade that is causing them so much pain. My words sounded empty.

After the service we talked about what happened during the Israeli invasion and the ministry of the hospital. Suhaila had prepared a wonderful lunch for us as she usually does when we are there. The hospital pharmacist, with some remaining fear in her voice, told of how she hunkered down while the bombs destroyed the large building next door hoping her shaking walls would not collapse upon her. Suhaila spoke of her desire to get to the hospital because so many casualties were coming in. When she finally did get to the hospital she did not go home for weeks. The hospital itself had no remaining glass in the windows. They used garbage bags to cover the windows as best they could so the patients would have some warmth. The windows have recently been repaired with glass that cost four times what it cost before. Most came through the tunnels.

Although it is not reported in the western press, the bombing continues everyday. Samira, Suhaila's assistant, said that in her area north of Gaza City they live with bombs and planes every day. The talk on the street is that there is another invasion coming. American and Israeli troops are on maneuvers in the Negev. This is the first time this has occurred.

There is still a great need for competent hospital care. Other hospitals were more severely damaged. Al Ahli is at capacity and, in spite of all, is doing some great things for the people they can care for. They have a new psycho-social program to treat children. Since the invasion, they have treated 660 children on an on going basis using most of the hospital staff. They have offered psycho-social training in the community. Forty five or fifty organizations have requested their services. Since the local mental health hospital was bombed and had to close, the need is even more acute.

They have opened a Women's Center with OB-GYN services and free breast cancer screening. They have already treated more than 550 women. In January they will expand the program with four new female MDs, five midwives, and one specialist. A midwife course will be offered to community and other hospital personnel. They have fed more than 800 elderly women who have little access to the few programs available. Suhaila said that 35,000 people had been treated by October, 2009.

Much depends on whether medical personnel can get permits to come into Gaza. Many MDs have been turned away at the border crossing. Currently, the Birds, a medical couple from Australia are working at the hospital in the psycho social unit and in the surgical unit doing plastic surgery. But they must leave at the end of November. I can only marvel at the staff's resilience and commitment. Suhaila is praying for a new building to incorporate their new work.

The ongoing issue is the refusal of permits by the IDF and the blockade of medicine, basic essentials, and building materials. Malnutrition, unemployment, and homelessness are rampant. Very rarely can Gazans get out. And frequently internationals are refused entry. I was indeed fortunate to get in. It is better to know than not to know. I know more than I want to know. But I am humbled by the friends we have made, their faith and compassion. We must stand with them. We cannot stop trying to release them from their captivity.

Pray for Gaza, pray for Israel, pray for us all,
Bob