

Angelina Jolie's Jordan Journal

December 10, 2003

Ruweished Camp, Jordan (*click [here](#) for the map*)

There are many families that make up more than 500 people in this camp. Most of them are Palestinians; over 100 of them are under 18.

It is a one hour ride to the camp. We are in a military helicopter because we are close to the Iraqi border. I am on a field visit with UNHCR Jordan. The Jordanian government assisted us with the access to the camp. Without the helicopter transport it would have taken us 3 hours by car to get to Ruweished. There is another camp that is further away it's called "No Man's Land Camp."

We visit a UNICEF/CARE pre school in the camp. The children are speaking about freedom and peace. They tell me how cold the winter will be in the desert. They tell me how they were forced to leave Iraq. "We lost our country. Then we were forced out of our host country, but what now?" they say.

Eleven young girls stand up and sing a song. The words translated for me are: "I love you Palestine. Live Palestine." They are not of Iraqi decent. They're mostly Palestinian refugees who had lived in Iraq. Now they are displaced once again. There are 10 girls under 7 here.

"Palestine was sold by merchants. God knows we are injured and hurt."

"Be patient we will take our revenge we will take our homes back."

The Sudanese and Somali children illustrate their story with pantomime. "Our tragedy began from the beginning of the war." There are 6 girls, 2 fall down.

The camp is very hot in the day and very cold in the night. They tell me they have spent nights on the floor huddled together for warmth.

"Till when? Till when?" The children perform a play about Jerusalem. It is about Arab children and how they live. They are holding hands around the smallest child. "Message to all the people of the world. Look at the Palestinian children. Look at us here."

"Help and pray to God to protect us." They huddle in groups to show how they hide during the bombings. "No one hears us these days. The sword has cut through our leather." (Smiles, fists in the air) "Palestine, your name is in our veins; as long as we're living you are our hero, precious to us."

In the school the children are between the ages of 4 and 12 years old. Their dream is to see their homeland. To live as citizens of a country they belong to. Most want to be teachers and doctors. One says architect, one lawyer. I ask why? "To make justice for people, there needs to be more justice." Thursday they study and do handcrafts. They also have competitions and plays. I ask, "What is the most difficult thing about living in a camp?" They all say, "The cold weather, the night and the sandstorms." A little voice says, "The storms."



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"We would love to be able to celebrate Eid. If we went home we could visit friends and maybe go to the entertainment." Eid is a day of celebrations for Muslims. "Eid" means recurring happiness or festivity. A very important aspect of Eid is the charity which all Muslims are expected to extend to the needy. The first Eid of the year, is known as "Eid Al-Fitr". Al Fitr literally means breaking of fast. Thus Eid Al Fitr is celebrated on the first day of Shawaal, the tenth month in the Muslim calendar, to mark the end of a month long fast during the month of Ramadan. It is believed that the Koran was revealed during this month. Coming with the full moon, Eid Al Fitr is a day of joy and thanksgiving. On this day Muslims, show their joy for the health, strength and opportunities of life, which Allah has given them to fulfill their obligations of fasting and other good deeds during the month of Ramadan. It is considered unholy to fast on this day. It is also a day of forgetting old grudges and ill feelings towards fellow men.

On the blackboard behind the children it reads "We want peace and safety." Siare, a child with tiny, sweet voice, about 8 years old says, "We were living in

Baghdad in peace. Then the first day of war we were very frightened from all the bombs and missiles.”

A woman says, “We came from that kind of fear to this kind of fear. Here we don’t know what we will do. We are unable to move. No country to belong to, our lives are uncertain. We were humiliated in Iraq as Palestinians. But at least for that while, we felt safe, then that changed. Here we feel safe from war but we know we cannot live here forever and don’t know where else we can go. We thank the camp manager; here at least we are safe. We want to sing him a song.” They do sing and it is beautiful. “We were kicked out of our houses after the war. We just want a place to live.” A man speaks up. He teaches English at the camp school. They thank the government of Jordan for allowing them into the country and for their hospitality. “We hope for children, life to improve.” As I am leaving a little Palestinian girl pats my arm. She wants to whisper in my ear. ‘Please help us.’ As we leave the tent the children flash peace signs.

Next we move onto CARE to their Community Service Center. It is a large white plastic tent with plastic chairs. A little girl comes up and starts drawing in my book.



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I am told she has bleeding in her brain. She has had x-rays at the “Hussein Medical Center”. A doctor has said that she must not be in the camp much longer. The little girl, the woman’s only child, cannot survive these harsh

conditions. They are Palestinians with an Iraqi travel document. They have no family or friends and nowhere to go.

We visit mothers at a feeding center, where they are given a formula to help nourish their children. They are striking very tall women with proud faces. 8 months ago a woman arrived and now she is 9 months pregnant and very worried about feeding her baby. A lot of women have trouble breast feeding. It is probably from stress. She is Somali, and she was living in Iraq during the war.

I ask why they cannot go back to Somalia and what is the fear? She says, "There is no independent country – there is constant war." The woman explains her husband was killed in Somalia. She gives me a letter. "Please accept it."

We are ushered into a large tent. It is a community meeting to give everyone a chance to have their voice heard. The tent is full .We kneel on dusty blue plastic mats.

First a government representative speaks. "Jordan was the first and only country to open borders from Iraq during the recent conflict. They give thanks to King Abdullah. We all must help our friends and brothers. We received you as transits. We will look after you and your human dignity until you find solutions. Since the beginning of time Jordan has been a friend to brothers, Camp leaders thank King Abdullah. Recently, some 386 Palestinians, who arrived in Jordan from Iraq with their Jordanian spouses and children, were (exceptionally) granted entry by the King to stay in Amman. We thank the King for their good fortune."

A woman speaks, a Somali female, she is alone. She has lost her mother. "I have no solution." That is all she says, she steps back into the crowd. Next a Somali man reads a letter he has prepared. "This is a Human Rights Day we have many Human Rights violations in our country. We thank you for being here today to hear us." A woman representing Palestinian women speaks. "We wish we could go home, we can't. Can we get out of this camp? We don't know how or when." I look at the children near her they have dark faces some are blue eyed, they are so stunning and beautiful. But haunting, their eyes so hollow, their faces so sad.

I notice a man with a very bad burn. On his hand and up the side of his face. His damaged hand lays limp in a cloth sling. I can only imagine how badly his arm must be burnt by the way it is covered. He steps forward. People are fighting to speak. The Somali man has kind eyes. He has been rejected two times for refugee status, he lost his father and rest of his family. He set himself on fire. "40% of my body is burnt." Can you imagine a life that is so bad that setting yourself on fire is your desperate call for help?

The next man speaks, he has broken English. His hands shake as he talks. "We have lost our families – we now go from country to country to find way to live as human being. We are beginning to lose hope."

A little girl motions for my pen and notebook. I give it to her. Letters thrust at me. A man with tears in his eyes says, "I lost two children during the war," he pulls out old dusty pictures and unfolds them.



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The little girl hands my notebook back to me. She has written me a letter in Arabic. Later at home I have it translated.

We race back to the helicopter before sunset. I meet with my friend Holly whom I traveled here with. She has just witnessed the same last few hours as I did. She also has tears in her eyes. "It's so sad." Why is there so much suffering? There is silence all the way home.

At home, I looked up Human Rights Day it led me to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It begins, "*Whereas recognition on the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.*" I encourage anyone reading this to look it up if you haven't already. And if you have maybe read it again as I did.

The following are some of the letters I was handed on that day.

Dear Sir/ Madams

Subject: Humanitarian solution request

After warm greetings. I am a mother for three children and now I am likely to give birth during the next weeks. I am a Somali mother who lost her ex-husband in the civil war of Somalia and her new one is victim too. Both of us live in this difficulty. Life a hopeless and helpless situation. I am the only rejected family of all Somalia families here in Ruweished camp. I can not return to Somalia due to an existing critical tribal circumstance and past negative experiences I met during the past decade. However, now I don't know what to do and where to go and I am here for God and the international community, especially those who care about humanity.

I am here for 8 months without hope and my problem still remains unsolved. Please look at me with a sympathetic and humanitarian eye on my case. Thanks.

Yours faithfully,

Fardus

Iraqi Poem

"Iraq...

Why do we love if in a day we may part?

Why do we love if our love will be lost?

Why.....why

We find ourselves lost and not one of us knows that we are like strangers

Why have we loved since the beginning?

Why have we been amorous without ending?

Do you not know that time will make our story a tale of goodbye?

I will not forget you even until the end of my life...!"

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