

21.12.2024

Dear friend and fellow South African,

We met at the Christian Institute Olive Justice Grove gathering on 8th December. Not all of you could attend but I have included you! My recent 56th Newsletter serves as a report on the event.

During the day at Goedgedacht we had the informal discussion about Palestine on the bases that those we came to honour would, without doubt, have taken a stand for justice of the Palestinian people and the Israelis who have dissented and been punished for their actions. Several of you voiced the need to want to do something - find a way of expressing solidarity with those suffering right now.

Mike van Graan and I arranged a subsequent evening meal, where Christine and I hosted, amongst local friends, some ten Palestinians, their young children included. They had fled Gaza in recent months (see story below) and taken advantage of South Africa's lenient visa policy with regard Palestinians. We asked them how best we might support their families and friends left behind.

To our (South African) shock we learnt of the plight of those given 3 month visas but no other options or legal avenues after the expiry of the 3 months. Their immediate past suffering, their trauma, their facing a future that looks dismal beyond words, presented itself to us in a way that put our plan for the meeting into the background for now.

Two families with us on this evening, others too, need legal advice and help that leads to refugees status in SA, that allows them to open accounts, gives them the right to work, and much, much more. I'm now in daily contact with them - and Mike lives right near them.

May I ask that you to consider making a small financial contribution? My bank details are below. This is a tiny way in which we can show empathy, if not (yet) more meaningful solidarity. My hope is to provide each family with the funds raised. I'll do a recon of the funds I receive and will share it with anyone who wants to see it. This is entirely a private and personal initiative within an emergency for 7 persons we can reach out to.

Below follows a little story I wrote after the evening they spent with us. I trust it conveys further insight into desperate people - whom we met.

Not looking away

He cannot speak English; I cannot speak Arabic. He is my guest. It is 18 December 2024. His wife speaks broken English. She introduces her, maybe ten year old, daughter and five-year-old son. Our eyes meet. Given different cultural norms I try to show empathy without embracing.

We have a meal together.

He is an author and has three published books to his name. That was in Gaza. The family have been in Cape Town for three months. He has a twelve month University of the Western Cape fellowship. This allowed him and his family entry into SA. But visas to Palestinians are for three months only; then they must apply for another three months. Right now their visas have expired and they wait for Home Affairs to stamp their passport for another three. The visa is does not include the right to work.

What happens when 4x three months is up? 'We don't know'. On his cell phone he shows me photos of their home in Rafah after it was bombed. The images are a corridor and rooms that the roof has fallen in on. The belongings lie scattered, broken furniture.

'We paid \$5000 for each one of us'. That the price for Israel to let Gazan's through the 'Philadelphia' corridor and for Egypt to allow them to enter. Egypt issues them with visas. 'Cairo and Cape Town are too expensive for us to live in'. 'My fellowship money has gone on three-months rent, transport, electricity and food. We don't know how to proceed'.

The Catholic Calibrini (name?) office provides advice and support. As does the legal advice office in the law faculty at UCT. 'But they are closed because of Christmas'.

A lively young woman artist is also present. She is with her mother. She wants connections, maybe share a studio. Looking into the eyes of her mother I recognise how close she is to bursting into tears. They too crossed into Egypt and then took advantage of SA's open-door visa provision.

But to be afforded a 3 month visa upon arrival might sound good and clearly offers an open door most other countries do not offer. But it's a cul-de-sac. Despite SA's taking Israel before the ICC and speaking out in international for a against the multiple violations of human rights Israel is committing, Palestinians able to escape from the war on them, SA does not accord them refugee status, residence rights or a work permit until it might be safe to return to their country.

Another visitor, also a highly skilled man introduces himself. 'Well, I cannot really tell you. Let me just say I am illegal (here)'.

How did they come to our cozy home in ST James, with views across False Bay? A recent friendship created the possibility. With others, at the Goedgedacht Christian Institute event on 8 December, we expressed out outrage about the Nakba on Palestinians that was always going to ignite resistance. We agreed that listening and talking had to lead to action, however limited and inadequate this might be. Silence or looking the other way is not an option. But how? – Can the encounter at our home mean anything, lead to anything?

For now, our immediate response is to crowd-fund for the family with their two children.

Please make a once-off payment to:

HGH Kleinschmidt,
ABSA Bank,
Heerengracht Branch,
a/c 4067039393

I shall write back to you individually to say how much money was raised. This is a once-off request to respond to now, before Xmas. Longer term support is being considered through other structures.

Thank you and good wished over coming days,

Horst

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