



The Challenge of Daily Violence

Some of you have, during a trip to Lebanon, visited with us the shantytown of Hay 'al Gharbeh and were struck, both by the extreme poverty and the warm welcome of its residents. Yes, we are, though foreigners, welcomed with a smile. We are invited to enter and sit on mattresses lying on the ground, and served tea. This is both reality and illusion: the neighborhood is **not** peaceful and benevolent. Violence is the simplest means to express anger. This violence is imposed on them, the neighborhood residents, much more than upon us.

If we are sometimes the targets of violence, it is because we are here, and we cannot be involved without taking some risks.

In February, we had to close our dispensary for a week after thinly veiled death threats: "... I know what I have to do, even if I have to spend 20 years in prison for it", threatened Mourdat, a young Kurdish Iraqi illegally in Lebanon, just recently deported and illegally re-entered to find his wife and children ... only to realize that his wife no longer wants anything to do with him, had placed one of the babies in an orphanage (with our help) and disappeared with the other. Violence was the only way to express his frustration and humiliation, his anger.

After having closed the dispensary for several days for security reasons, we arranged a meeting with him and some neighbors who wanted the dispensary to re-open. Mourdat felt listened to and understood and apologized to me.

Several days later, I learned that one of our young friends, age 14, disappeared after having violently sexually abused an 8-year old boy. This boy is in the hospital, and Osman, the 14-year old, is being tracked down in the side streets of the Palestinian camps and the shantytown. The victim's father offered a reward of \$100 to anyone finding him. He was found and beaten by the victim's father and the brothers. They then handed him over to an armed group who also beat him, then put him in the hands of the police who put him in prison ... after having beaten him. But who is the guilty party? Where is the victim? Osman was in the streets, his father deceased and abandoned by his mother at the age of 6 and himself victim of how much abuse?

Several weeks later, our dispensary assistant, Zeina, was awakened by the cries of her neighbor lady. Opening her door, she found her self nose to nose with a living torch: the depressed neighbor man doused himself in gasoline and set fire to himself. The time it took to find blankets and put out the fire, the man was deeply burned from his head to his legs. Zeina helped carry him to a car, horrified to see several of his fingers fall to the ground. The son of the burned man (Selim, the worker who just helped to redo our dispensary ceiling) tried to hospitalize him. The cost of admission to the hospital was \$4,000 to \$5,000. Disgusted and bitter, he took his father home and the man died a few hours later.

In this context, what can we bring as a modest dispensary with little means? More than free medical care, we must develop our work of **prevention**. We want to offer listening ears and dialogue as an alternative to violent communication. We are currently beginning a club for adolescent girls ages 13 to 20. Our action is modest, our facilities limited and yet lives can be changed.

We are so grateful to our partners, for your encouragement, your faithful giving and your prayers on our behalf. To daily violence, let us respond with daily love!