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A letter from the family: the human family

by Joan Chittister

From *Where I Stand*

Here's the basic problem with war: It's planned by politicians and fought by the rest of a country. At this point, over 90 percent of the victims of war, the United Nations reports and researchers confirm, are not soldiers. They are civilians -- and most of them women and children.

So while the talks go leisurely on in the great international assemblies of the world -- or while we refuse to talk about it at all -- people who have nothing to do with the conflict, no way to surrender in its midst, no voice at all in its resolution -- go on running and dying, dying and running from the violence they cannot avoid.

I got another letter in this week's mail from a Palestinian citizen of Israel who has been active in the peace movement there for years. As well as decrying war, she creates programs designed to address the trauma this ongoing war between Palestinians and Israelis wreaks on the children who will be scarred by it for life -- and who, therefore, may likely go on repeating it forever.

Her letter makes some important points of which the world dearly needs to be aware:

First, these people feel forgotten by the rest of us. They do not hear our own cries in their behalf and this only increases their suffering and despair. We must raise our voices.

Second, she unmasks for us the clever use of media to desensitize the consciousness of the world to the obscenity of this violence.

Third, she exposes the operant -- but seriously distorted reasoning on both sides -- that maintains the appetite for war. We must begin to see that one war only seeds the next one.

Fourth, she demonstrates the frustration of women who see themselves as the victims of male power plays, male war games and male analyses.

So I'm publishing this letter because I believe that it is time to see behind the politicians and the generals. Think of it as a letter from someone in your family caught in such a travesty, unable to save themselves and reaching out to you. Now how do you feel about it?

Surely, we must stop converting people into the numbers that sterilize the violence of war. We must begin to see their faces and hear the voices of those who live in the countries that are being pulverized for the sake of political gain.

From where I stand, it seems we must also ask how we feel about the failure of our own country to demand a cease-fire here -- and to have also launched all-out war ourselves against a defenseless people whose civilian citizens are now dying, we're told, at the rate of 100 a day?

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After all, isn't it the way we ourselves regard our own newly designed foreign policy of brutality that will determine the future of this country, as well as theirs?

The following letter has been edited only for spelling, grammar and clarity.

Dear Friends,

The last six days were very difficult days, again we are in a war!!! And again we have to live in fear and to suffer from the destruction that we witness in Lebanon , Israel and Palestine .

I decided to write to you all since some of you, and especially after the news about the attack over Nazareth, began to call and ask about our situation and what they can do for us.

So let me tell you that we are not hurt physically yet. Personally, I miss very much the voice of sanity in these times. I miss the voice of all men and women who struggle and are still struggling for peace in the region. I miss them not because we stopped the work for peace, but because we are not given the opportunity to express the ideas. It seems from over here that the world is celebrating this war. I feel that we here cannot do it alone.

The peace movement in Israel manages to organize several small demonstrations until now but could not reach the media yet.

Witnessing the news in the Israeli Media made me furious. Most of the analysts are men, Generals that are celebrating this war and most of them ask the government to continue this war and to continue the destruction. In the first days they refused to call it war, they were saying it is only an action. They thought that after the airplanes attack Lebanon two or three days, everything will be finished. Now they call it war and they prepare the public opinion for at least another week.

The most amazing thing (is) that the Israeli TV in the last few days stopped to give (giving) concrete information about the exact places that are attacked and are not showing U.S. citizens the suffering of the injured persons. They concentrate on the destruction of the buildings and infrastructure in Lebanon. What happened to the people who live in these buildings no one seems to be interested.

Living among the people in Israel, I witness the fear of the adults and children, the uncertainty, the helplessness. These feelings are not given space in the media. (Instead,) they have been silenced because in time of war the role of the media and the politician is to protect the morale of the people. The people of Israel should not express feelings (about the war) because their role today is to send their sons willingly to feed the war machine and to suffer in silence.

The military is preparing Israeli public opinion for long days of war and then we will have silence, they say. We will destroy Hezbollah and we will have silence, they try to convince (us). And most people believe that and began to argue in these lines!!

They do not tell them that the past 60 years proved their theory to be wrong. They do not tell them that the history of mankind proved this theory to be wrong. They do not tell them that war do not solve problems; it create hundred others.

Itemizing. Most of the Arabic media (TVS)(except the news channels) continue in their programs as the war does not concern them. The Arabic news channels are also full of male analysis that argue the (wisdom of the timing) of Hezbollah. They don't argue the war as a strategy. It is only about the timing. The reporters are reporting from faraway watching points without people. The human suffering is not seen.

Living. The Palestinian citizens of Israel live in unsecured houses. (There are no Public shelters in Arab towns and villages in Israel, and most of the houses are ancient houses without the secure rooms which is a requirement for building permissions after 1992.)

They have to deal with the rockets falling in their villages and what it brings with it from destruction, fears, insecurity in (the bombed villages) of Megd alkrum, Bikaae, Kuferyassif, abusinan, yanouh, joulis, Nazareth.

Working with children and families in these conditions, most of them do not know how to deal with their children's fears, nightmares, etc. These voices are not listened to, they have no space in these crazy days.

Nevertheless, the talk among the people here is celebrating the war too. They are (be)having as reported in the media. These reports are not showing the real picture of burned people, of death injured people, which makes it easy to most of the people to celebrate the attacks over Israel.

They argue "Finally Israel is suffering like our people. Finally Israel is having war beside their homes and not in other people's land like the West Bank, Gaza, Golan , Lebanon . Finally the unbeaten Army cannot stop Hezbollah rackets from reaching Haifa . Finally the arrogance of the Israeli political person and Generals is hurt".

In such a situation the work of the peace movement is very important, but we cannot do it alone. We need your help and support all over.

You can make a difference if every one does something. Individuals and groups, call upon Israeli embassy and demand to stop the war. Call upon U.S. embassy and demand to stop the support for this

war. Send letters to Hezbollah to stop the war. Call upon every one and tell them war do not solve problems; it creates new ones. In order to reach peace, justice and security we need to demand to:

Stop the war.

Stop the destruction.

End the occupation.

Recognize the right of the Palestinian people for their independent state alongside Israel.

Negotiate for peace.

Yours,

Nabila Espanioly

*** Please note that there will be no From Where I Stand column next week as Sr. Joan is traveling. ***

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