

Youth Universal Peace Federation event: Forced Displacement and Migration: Time to Rethink Human Dignity

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To reflect upon the human rights abuses that make individuals feel it necessary to seek escape their home town or nation, the Youth Universal Peace Federation event, organised and chaired by Amira El-Houderi, “Forced Displacement and Migration: Time to Rethink Human Dignity” created an interesting balance of the two sad phenomena. Presented with two sets of panelists in the House of Commons Committee Room, the audience was given personal insight into the struggles and discrimination faced by refugees, as well as being told of the positive actions being taken to commend the talents and knowledge that refugees can bring to Europe.

Despite the fact that the first panel was focused upon the discussion of

refugees from North Korea and Syria, and the second drawing attention to the displacement and migration in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi, both panels spoke of human rights. In fact, human rights and human rights abuses were at the forefront, particularly of the discussion regarding Libya.



Starting with an overview of the Libyan conflict, the speaker, Sharon Ward, told of how she went out to Libya with the intention of filming the rebels (who were then fighting against Gaddafi’s dictatorship and human rights abuses), and the first time that she went to Libya, this is exactly what she did. However, returning, she realized that there was another story to be told, the story of the Tawerghan’s.

Tawergha, she said, is now a ghost town, and all of the

people that lived there have been scattered around Libya, forced into refugee camps. Labeled as Gaddafi sympathizers, they are not only facing discrimination, but are experiencing collective punishment and arbitrary justice at the hands of the rebels. One Tawerghan was even quoted as saying, “I supported the revolution, but for what?”

Also exploring the conflict of Tawergha, Dr Fatima Hamroush spoke in terms of humanity. He spoke of dignity and identity, and of the disappointment felt by Libyan’s that instead of there being a prevalence of human rights after the fall of Gaddafi, it has instead manifested itself into groups torturing and killing each other in acts of revenge and discrimination. But there was also the message of hope.

Ms Huda El Khoja spoke not of the effect of the rebels fighting against the Tawerghan’s but of the prospect of peace. Her organisation, 'Tripoli Good', helps to get people to think of others and to help them to reduce their suffering. Often, she pointed out, the children of the internally displaced people do not know what is happening. They have essentially lost their freedom, dignity and human rights before understanding that they have them. Tripoli Good seeks to remind these children that they are part of

society and aims to give them some type of education. Pertinently she ended by saying, “Home is not where you’re born. Home is where dignity is formed.”



Ms Huda El Khoja’s closing comments reinforced a lot of what was shared in the first panel regarding North Korea and Syria. This is due to the fact that a lot of these panelists chose to focus on the work that is being done to stop discrimination against refugees and migrants, and to help them better

integrate into their new homes with dignity.

Mr Keith Best was one of the first people to speak. As such, he provided a brief historical overview of migration, causing the audience to think about a world without passports and identity cards. In the 18th and early 19th century, he stated, this was unbelievably the case, and, freedom of migration was one of the ways that people achieved measurable progress in all fields. Of course, migrating out of choice and seeking refuge are very different things, but he argued that the humanitarian aspects of how countries react to new people entering their borders should be the same, and every individual should be treated with humility and acknowledged for the vast amounts of skills they have or could possess.



Dr Hailu Hagos who spoke about his organization WHEAT Mentor Support Trust (Welfare, Health, Employment and Access to further education and Training) followed Mr Keith Best’s argument. He stated that refugees from places such as Syria and North Korea have a lot of skills, and for many people, all that they need is a place where they can build on them or enhance their vocabulary. He went on to say that the people he comes into contact with

often build up these skills extremely quickly, as they want to work, which in turn is good for the economy and thus the country as a whole.



The drive to integrate refugees into everyday life was also picked up by Brian Quaife and Jennifer Dew who spoke on behalf of IOM (International Organisation for Migration) and who were extremely passionate about the work that they do. They spoke regarding the services that they offer such as vaccinations (both oral and intravenous), cultural orientation, travel services and help with VISA’s. When Quaife spoke of the manner in

which they help Syrian refugees to rebuild their lives in security without the fear of torture it was evident how important this work was, as well as how rewarding it must be for them both to be able to help people rebuild their lives.

Despite programs like IOM being in place however, when Sleman Shwaish, a Syrian refugee spoke, it became evident that more needs to be done to protect people's human rights. When he spoke, he spoke of how many people that want to flee Syria still have to wait for their paperwork despite the situation. During this time, they have to continue as normal, working and studying, whilst fearing that they may die at any given moment. The frightening reality of this seems unimaginable.

While Shwaish spoke in a very matter of fact way with regards to the state of affairs in Syria, Ms Jihyun Park, a refugee from North Korea spoke very personally about her own experiences. Her account of how she fled from hunger and was offered a job in China only to be sold into slavery before escaping was incredibly moving, and I think was quite shocking for the audience to hear. Thinking of stories like Ms Jihyun Park's and Shwaish's as well as those of the Tawerghan's it is easy to see the discrimination present in all aspects of forced migration and displacement, however, it is encouraging to know that movement is underway to help these individuals maintain their dignity wherever they may end up. (5 photos)