

The Arabian Peninsula Peace Project for Guidance and Tolerance without Borders: Experience from travels in Yemen by David Jones

A year ago this time I was in Yemen I had never been to the Middle East, although I have been in other Muslim societies such as Malaysia and Kosovo. Yemen was the first Arab nation I have visited. It was an extraordinary experience. I am not going to pass my cultural assumptions along. All I am able to do is accept what is happening and try and understand from my hosts their culture. I have learned a long time ago that people and customs vary around the world from food, language, dress and roles of power. Suffice it to say that I am in no position to know what works and why for people.

Yemen is of critical importance strategically, and due to this fact, there needs to be preventive conflict mitigation efforts employed. Yemen is not “just” a terrorist hideout. It is also a very deeply spiritual place with deeply spiritual religious people living very difficult lives in a difficult region of the world. We should not ignore Yemen because the risk of another conflict zone in the Islamic world is not what is needed and we know it. So there is a sense of urgency. Critical thinking on how to avoid losing the minds and hearts of the Yemeni people should be a mission for someone. I can tell you sending drone bombs are not the way of peaceful change. No matter how many people we kill we will not change them through violent means.

A year after my visit, Yemen continues to be of critical importance, due to the explosive content that still comes from the country. Despite its connection to terrorist plots, Yemen needs peace building and conflict resolution professionals who will work for a peaceful transformation there. I believe this, and this is why I am writing to my fellow Caux Scholar alumni. It is a wonderful world and those of us who study peace building have to work for alternatives to violence, and for a transformation from hate to love, from terrorism to tolerance. All of the learning from peace education schools means nothing if it is not applied.

My role in the world, as I see it, is being a “transdisciplinary transformational change agent.” I don’t know if it is a professional title but it has led to some meaningful negotiations with governmental officials in Yemen on how to prevent future Jihad holy warriors from joining AQAP. Amminadab and I are seeking project-specific funding currently for what we have agreed to do in Sana, Yemen. 2010 has been a difficult year for me personally with the budget crisis here in the United States. There is no money for the type of support that is needed in Yemen, or for that matter, for services in Oregon for the addiction treatment work I do with transitioning youth offenders back into the community. Everyone is screaming, “I don’t have anything to give.” We should think deeply about the alternative--can we afford not to? We need locally based projects here at home to prevent crime, addiction and incarceration, and we need international programs abroad that prevent terrorist ideology from spreading to young people and acts of terror from striking fear. Peace has to pay, and right now crime and conflict pays more. Putting prosperity into the perspective of global peacemaking is a priority of my transformational change philosophy.

One way to build dialogue is through social networking and broadcast media. Yet young Yemeni does not have the freedom we take for granted or the resources to gain information readily. There is resource deficit of technological access. “Tolerance and Guidance are needed in the Arabian Peninsula, not more ways to kill people.”

Sincerely,

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To -view 60 Minutes segment about Yemen:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7253057n&tag=contentMain>