



WHILE SITTING IN A SIDON CAFE, ACHMAD EAGERLY TALKS ABOUT THE YEARS OF CONFLICT IN LEBANON. "LIFE IS DEFINITELY BETTER NOW."

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EIN HILWE REFUGEE CAMP, SIDON, LEBANON -- Sometimes, what you hear is joltingly different from what you expect. "No matter what, we'll stop the Israelis ... from leaving Lebanon. We'll lie in front of their tanks if we have to. We've lived in terror of the PLO for years and now the Israelis are protecting us. We're petrified of what will happen if they leave." Farik, a Palestinian doctor in this refugee is almost aggressive with his words.

Standing in the partially - destroyed

Palestinian camp, I thought I was hearing things. Farik's words were quite a shock. Hostile media have portrayed Israelis as ruthless conquerors and heartless occupiers. But they are seen, by the very people they're supposed to be oppressing, as literal saviors.

If Farik's words were a splash, I was soon confronted with a torrent of anti-PLO emotion from Lebanese Christians, Moslems and Palestinians alike. The attitudes were all the more remarkable because the interviews took place after the Phalangist killings of Palestinian refugees in Beirut.

Achmad angrily spat as he said "I won't use the words that describe the Arab countries. They have put a black cloud on Lebanon. They have been using us since 1948, crying about us in public for their own purposes. But they've never done anything to help us. They won't even give us visas."

Not surprisingly, these Palestinians never want to set foot in another Arab country other than Lebanon. Very surprisingly, however, their first choice of residence is -- Israel. An international chorus of accusation has been orchestrated over Israel's alleged treatment of Palestinians. The Palestinians themselves view life under Israeli rule as an oasis of humanity in a wilderness of violence and fear.

Farik was joined in a chorus of agreement when he said, "Our first choice would be to live as Israeli citizens, our second choice as Lebanese citizens, and our third, citizens of any Western country and never...I repeat never, as citizens of other Arab countries, especially a PLO state."

As these people speak, a question lingers in the back of my thoughts: What could the PLO have done to make their own people say, "We never want to live under a PLO government?" The refugees do not hesitate to answer the unasked question.

Farik painfully lo-

wers his voice. "My brother was killed by the PLO. They swelled their ranks out of fear, not loyalty. It was simple really. The PLO would come to your home to "persuade" you to join or to hide arms for them. If you said no, soon afterward a daughter might be raped or a son is shot. The next time they came to your home, they wouldn't have to ask."

Hussein was quick to add, "And there were many other ways to get your cooperation. You don't understand what it's been like. They infected everything. If they didn't like you, you couldn't even get a job -- whether that meant a job as a doctor or a doorman. It was never the best doorman who would get the job, it was the doorman who the PLO liked."

"Who the PLO liked" have been haunting words for the Palestinian refugees. Several miles from the refugee camp stand the remains of the Sidon PLO headquarters. A generous space in that headquarters was reserved for people imprisoned by the PLO. The dank, filthy cells survived the

bombing. An Israeli Defense Forces officer responds to an inquiry concerning the infraction of the former prison occupants: "Oh -- they were people the PLO didn't like."

He pointed to a small cell with enough space for one man to occupy in a bent position and said, "This is where they'd go for a week if they were really disliked. We found a couple of Israeli Arabs in here who had come to Lebanon to visit relatives. The PLO wanted the

Israeli Arabs to join the organization. They said 'no' and were thrown in here. That's all -- that was enough to be a prisoner."



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