

WORD IN ACTION

Going beyond all borders (Part 3)



We continue with two more experiences shared by young people at Genfest 2018 in Manila, the Philippines

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

Azeez Sadeq from Iraq: Before I tell you my story, I want to ask you a question. Think with me for a moment. Has it ever crossed your mind that in any moment: you could lose everything? Suddenly, without warning, in a single day: you lose the home you grew up in... your best friends... your family... your dreams.

Like most 18-year-olds, I lived a normal life – a house with a family, the opportunity to go to school, and enjoyed sports and other activities. However, one day, everything collapsed. A terrorist group arrived in my village. After the withdrawal of the armed forces, the resistance didn't last long and my village surrendered to these invaders. On 6th August, we had to leave the village with whatever clothes we were wearing because we were

given a choice: to renounce our faith, pay these people a ransom... or be beheaded.

Everything seemed like an action movie where I couldn't tell the difference between what had actually happened and what I had imagined in my head. Before leaving our home, my mum went down on her knees and started praying to God that we might still have a house to come back to in the future (our home was one of the very few houses that wasn't bombed or set on fire). I cannot begin to describe to you the crowds of refugees, the distress of them walking away from their livelihood, the tears, the look on the soldiers' faces, seeing families sleeping on the road. The journey that normally would've taken half an hour took twelve.

We then headed for Dohuk where we stayed for around two months. It was a very painful time because we waited for weeks, desperate to return to our city.

However, this was just a dream as it was still occupied by terrorists.

I realised that if I remained rooted in my suffering, nothing would change and I wouldn't be able to move forward. I identified with Jesus nailed on the cross as I went through this difficult moment and I recalled his cry to the Father: 'Why have You forsaken Me?' I felt helpless, as he was helpless – abandoned and alone. So I entrusted myself to him and decided to live the present moment fully, living for those around me.

With us was the Yazidi community, who needed more help than us, because the terrorist group had not allowed

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Everything seemed like an action movie...



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Find out more about Genfest and United World Project:

<http://www.unitedworldproject.org/en/>
<http://y4uw.org/events/genfest-2018/>

Genfest official photoalbums & Youth for a United World's albums from 2010-2018

https://www.flickr.com/photos/y4uw_official/albums

them to flee. They had killed the men and raped the women, and those who'd managed to escape had become so desperate. I tried to forget my own pain in order to console them.

After two months of exile, my parents chose to come to France because it welcomed us. We arrived in October 2014. Strangers from everywhere accommodated and helped us in so many ways. In these moments I felt that God was working through these kind people and making my parents feel loved. In the beginning it was really difficult for them since they had high ranking positions at their workplaces in Iraq, but here in France they had to adjust to more 'normal jobs', and learning French was more difficult for them.

So here I am now in front of you – a young person living for a united world! Now, I am able to speak a new language and I'm at university as well. As young people, we have enormous potential to be the change we want to see in this world. I understand very clearly now that through sharing my experience with other people, I am able to share God's love in very difficult moments. Thank you!



DIALOGUE IN POLITICS, SPAIN

Josu: Spain is made up of seventeen autonomous communities, each of them with its own culture, traditions and even language. Since 2010, the pro-independence movements intensified, especially in Catalonia, where on October 1st 2017 a self-determination referendum was held. It was later declared illegal by the central Spanish Government. Consequently, the region's autonomy was suspended and many politicians were called to testify in court. Some of them were even taken into custody while awaiting trial.

Marti: I'm from Catalonia and currently living in Madrid. For me it has been complicated to start this new chapter in Madrid with the outbreak of such a situation. My first three months in this city were extremely tough. In the residence where I live, I was treated badly just for being Catalan (I was the only one out of 150 residents). What hurt me most was that, also in the group of Youth for a United World (Y4UW), we were arguing about this situation and getting constantly angry with one another due to our opposite points of view. Knowing that we couldn't go ahead like this we sat down and started discussing the issues deeply, trying to listen to each other



Photo: ©Silvano Soliveres

and putting aside our differences. Feeling respected and valued allowed us to go beyond these barriers.

Alba: I'm from Barcelona. I believe that being here talking together with people that think quite differently to me, is already evidence of what unity means. Even though this situation has generated a lot of personal and social sorrow it has also given me the chance to go through experiences that made me learn and grow as an individual. When the referendum was held in Catalonia, the police violence was terrible. Some of the Catalan Y4UW, including me, were right there in the middle of it. I had mixed feelings – happiness, pride and freedom as a nation but at the same time fear, anger and sadness. I was pretty active on social media. Many of the other Y4UW comments hurt me but I hadn't realized that my way of expressing myself hurt them as well. In those days there was a youth congress in Madrid, where we were asked to share our experiences and thoughts about the political situation. I wasn't able to speak as the wounds were too raw. Later that day, someone came up to me to talk in more depth. It was difficult at first, because neither of us knew how to tackle the issues without hurting one

another. It was then that this person suggested that we put love in the first place. I was really surprised! Starting and ending in 'love', we spoke to each other on an equal footing, really listening to what the other had to say, rather than defending our own ideas. I realized that the other person is far more important than our opinions. We're still working on this dialogue, and our opinions haven't dramatically changed. Sometimes we forget to put love first, and have to start again.

Laura: I am Spanish and profoundly identify with my country's roots. In the days close to the 1st October I was feeling sad about everything that was happening. I didn't understand why there were people that wanted to separate from Spain, although I knew I had to make an effort to empathise and try to understand them. But it wasn't easy. Furthermore, the mass media were everywhere and it was hard to understand where the truth was. Most of all it was painful to see there was no willingness for dialogue. At that point, I saw on social networks a call of action, for peace and dialogue, to which we were invited to participate with no flags. Its purpose was simply for the politicians to sit down and dialogue. I completely identified with this initiative and invited some friends through my WhatsApp chats. To my surprise my invitation didn't get a good reception! The day of the demonstration involved very diverse groups of people. We were in Madrid only a few metres away from the square where another demonstration was taking place. Its colour, red, together with its Spanish flag. I experienced a deep pain since I love my colours and my flag but at that moment I felt that the flag was only pushing us further apart. When I posted a photo of myself dressed in white on social networks, I received many posts with both positive and negative comments. My friends and I thought that the real change had to start within our circle. I remembered my previous proposal on WhatsApp and all the negative feedback. If I really wished to promote dialogue I had to start from there. Therefore, I proposed having a coffee with whoever wanted to chat. Thereby a space for dialogue began and still today everyone can express what they feel without being judged, bringing our ideas together and looking for shared solutions.

Josu: For us this is still an unfinished road. We keep paving the way, day by day, struggling with uncertainty and pain, but also enriched by the different experiences we've shared. We are convinced that we have to intensify dialogue showing that the path towards fraternity starts there. ■