

Arab Christian paramedic in Nazareth promotes unity

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NAZARETH, Israel (BP)—As a 15-year-old high school student in Nazareth, Arab Christian Yasmeeen Mazzawi wanted to learn the history of the Jews she met volunteering as a paramedic with Magen David Adom, Israel's national emergency medical services.

Her decision to visit Auschwitz with a team of Magen David Adom volunteers challenged her friendships with Muslim and Christian classmates at Nazareth Baptist School, founded by Southern Baptist missionaries in 1935.

As her classmates and even teachers ostracized her, Mazzawi responded by embarking on a successful campaign to spread cross-cultural understanding among Israel's diverse population of Jews, Christians, Arabs, Muslims and others. She spoke at nongovernmental organizations, schools and youth camps across Israel, and utilized social media.

"To bridge between Arabs and Jews, to me that was a huge success. They understood that after they met the people, the Jewish people, they are just like us," Mazzawi said of her classmates.

"What connects us at the end of the day is values. Christians by themselves are different. I think this is the beauty of the world, that we are different. It's like this mosaic, and each one brings his added value and his own beauty to this world."

‘All of us work together to save lives’

Her Christian faith and love of humanity drive her continued commitment to cross-cultural understanding during the Israel-Hamas War.

Volunteering with Magen David Adom, she treats soldiers and civilians injured on Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, combat overshadowed by the center of the war in Gaza.

“Arabs and Jews, all of us work together to save lives,” Mazzawi said, describing MDA forces composed of Arabs, Christians, Jews, Muslims and Bedouins from very diverse backgrounds. “We are very dedicated and we love what we do.”

She believes rising antisemitism since the Oct. 7 attack on Southern Israel stems from a lack of understanding. Particularly on U.S. college campuses, where students called for divestiture from Israel and freedom for Palestine, she believes scholarly conversations could have eased tensions.

“I grew up on values. We grew up loving the other, accepting the other,” Mazzawi said. “If you try maybe to talk to one another, I’m pretty sure a huge percentage of these people will maybe not change their minds, but they can step back and maybe understand from the beginning.”

‘We have to be united’

On Oct. 7, Mazzawi had planned to travel to Mannheim Business School in Germany, where she completed her studies in November, but the attack changed her plans.

“I stayed here in Israel in case there was anything I could help with. I stayed with my Jewish friends, and Arab friends were in the South,” she said.

“We have to be here together, especially these days. We have to be united. We have to show that we are different here in Israel. We are diverse, but at the end of the day, we’re together, and we have to put politics away.”

Many of her friends in Southern Israel were killed in the attack, and others were taken hostage.

“What happened here in Israel was horrible. We found ourselves for two weeks going from home to home, to friends, staying with them and strengthening them,” she said of her family. “It was a really hard time.”

God ‘brought me here to make a difference’

She relies on her faith and fellow Magen David Adom volunteers for strength and resilience in war, leading paramedic teams into danger as others run for cover. Teams of paramedics systemically treat the most severe cases first, whether soldiers or civilians.

“There’s always this fear. When we go to the borders, it’s dangerous, and I have to make sure everyone’s safe,” Mazzawi said. “We have to separate our minds from our hearts. We have to do everything we can to save lives. It’s not easy, but we know how to do it well. We are very dedicated and we love what we do.

“Military teams are ready. We know how to deal with these situations. It’s very amazing if I zoom out and look at the scene. It’s just amazing how you see everyone working together.”

She encourages others to look beyond politics and learn Israel’s history and contemporary culture.

“Many people have lack of knowledge about Jews and Israel. They are

talking about politics, but many in Israel don't agree with politics," she said. "Many Jews and Arabs don't agree with the current situation in Israel.

"At the end of the day, Israel is an amazing country. People here want to live in peace. People here love one another."

She finds comfort in her belief that God is in control, and her hope for a brighter future.

"My faith, it helps me with the fear," she said. "I have this belief that our Heavenly Father is with us, and I believe he brought me here to make a difference. Things happen for a reason at the end of the day."