

DISABLED YOUTHS RETURN TO BEIRUT

“The Friends of Waldorf Education” succeeded in their mission to help these youth return home

The group of 15 students and two teachers took on an invitation from the city of Stuttgart on the occasion of the soccer world cup to participate at the Unesco – world youth festival. The outbreak of the war as well as the destruction of the Beirut airport prohibited their planned return.

Although these Lebanese pupils were well accommodated and cared for by the Karl – Schubert – School in Stuttgart, as well as the Stuttgart youth association in cooperation with the city of Stuttgart who did everything humanly possible to arrange the stay of the pupils with diversity and comfort, the group and their still in Lebanon living parents decided against the advice of their German custodians, for a fastest possible return home. The wish to be reunited with the family was stronger than the fear of war.

Elaborate preparations and tears of joy after their return

The journey went by plane from Stuttgart via Istanbul to Damascus. From here the youths were transported in a 7 hour journey, to the Syrian-Lebanese border of Arida. The journey then continued along the coastal road in little busses marked with German flags through Tripoli to Beirut. This 150 km route was very complicated to travel as all bridges were destroyed by missile attacks. The edge of road was lined with ruined car wrecks also many of the filling stations were destroyed in attacks. At about 19h00 the children could be handed over to their parents in the Fista offices, the Lebanese partner organisation for “The Friends of Waldorf Education”. The joy at the reception was indescribable. Everywhere parents and children were hugging and kissing each other with tears of joy.

For days in advance a preparatory group from “The Friends of Waldorf Education” were travelling to Syria, to plan the accommodation, the travel routes, to check out the transportation and to set up a base camp in Syria. The repatriation of the youth was managed by Chairperson of the board for “The Friends of Waldorf Education” and accompanied by the Anthroposophical paediatrician Dr. Karl-Reinhard Kummer from Karlsruhe.

The journey travel and the marking of the Vehicles were coordinated with the international Red Cross, the Red Half Moon, the Syrian and Lebanese embassy as well as the foreign administration in Berlin. The Israeli embassy was informed of the repatriation well in advance. In a security letter the German Unesco commission requested support from all national and international institutions for a safe repatriation.

In conversation with the state president

On the 9.08.2006 the German support team from “The Friends of Waldorf Education” were received in audience of the Lebanese state president Lahoud. The president gave recognition and thanks to the team as well as congratulated them on their successful mission. In conversation the possibility arose to address the possibility of Waldorf education in Lebanon after the war and other support possibilities from “The Friends of Waldorf Education” for the traumatised Lebanese children.

During the night of the 09.08.2006 southern Beirut was marked by missile attacks. The blast destroyed buildings that were kilometres away, windows threatened to burst asunder. The city was dark and ghostly.

Because of the ruined roads the supply situation became difficult. Many shops have closed, medicine can hardly be found and electricity is financially unaffordable. For 10 litres of fuel one has to stand in a kilometre long queue for almost six hours. The city is completely over populated by war refugees from the south of the country. The Rudolf Steiner School in Beirut has also become a refugee camp. A humanitarian disaster is threatening if a ceasefire is not agreed upon soon. The people here are in despair. Many are angry, feel destitute and abandoned by the rest of the world especially the west.

In the night of 09.08 the German helpers from "The Friends of Waldorf Education" left Lebanon on the same route as they arrived. A few hours later this coastal road was made impassable by missile attacks and the city centre of Beirut, was now for the first time since the hostilities, being bombarded by missiles.

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