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Interview: Tina Hannouneh, American beaten by Israeli guards at border crossing

IMEMC Audio Team, transcribed by Tania Tabar - Monday, 24 July 2006



Monday, 24 July 2006, 03:06

This is an interview with Tina Hannouneh, an American of Palestinian origin who was beaten by Israeli border guards, along with her son, at the Israeli-controlled Allenby Bridge border crossing between Jordan and the West Bank.

Q: I'm speaking with Tina Hannouneh, an American citizen. Could you tell me about your experience at the Allenby Bridge border crossing?

A: Well, you know what, it was really terrible because as soon as we got in they jumped my son and they wanted to take his ipod and they didn't even ask, 'Can you give me this?' He said to him in Arabic 'give me this.' My son, he doesn't understand any Arabic. And he said 'no' and as soon as he said 'no,' they started hitting him. He hit him, dropped him on the floor and started punching him.

I started to interfere, I told him 'you know, he doesn't speak Arabic.' Can you speak to him in English?' I told my son to give him what he wants. He hit my face, hit my nose, and broke my nose. I fell down, I hit my nose and head, and have stitches, like deep ones on my left eye. I started bleeding. Another guy had his gun in my face, pointed between my eyes, and he said, 'if you say one word I will shoot you.' I just stayed quiet. And it was really terrible. My son was so excited to come over here, and now he is not. He was so disappointed and he didn't even go to a doctor because he is scared. So I don't know what to tell you. It's really awful.

Q: Did the men who assaulted your son identify themselves as officers?

A: No. Not at all. If they did none of this would have happened. If he did my son would

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have gave it to him. He thought that any guy wanted to take his ipod and he paid for it from his own pocket. He worked hard for it and he's not going to let anybody take it. If that guy had identified himself as a police officer or security, my son would have given it to him.

Q: He thought it was someone trying to steal the device?

A: Yes.

Q: Why do you think that the security guards at Allenby pounced on your son in such an aggressive way? Why did they target him?

A: I really don't know. I look like an Arab and he's a young kid. As soon as they heard me speaking English to my son, they came from inside running outside, and they said 'Arab-American.' They knew that I'm Arab and my son is American. I think at that time they stopped and they started apologizing and they cleaned up my face.

He was hitting my son real bad. And I was yelling at him until that guy came who said he was going to shoot me if I said one more word. I have dark skin and I look like an Arab, because I was born here in Bethlehem.

Q: You are from Beit Sahour?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you Christian?

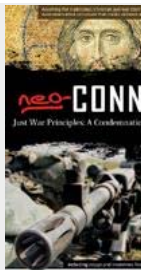
A: Yes, I am Christian. I have a Christian family. All of us are Christian.

Q: I think many Americans are not aware of the Palestinian Christian population.

A: Yes that's true. I work in Arizona and I have a lot of people who are surprised to hear that there are Christians in Bethlehem. I tell them that this is the land of Christ and a lot of people are Christian over there. But Most of them, they flee the country because they want to live. They fear for their families, their kids. There are still a lot of them there and they are still suffering.

Q: Now back to your son. Is this his first trip into Palestine?

A: Since 1997. He was a young kid back in 1997 and this is now his second trip and back then he didn't know anything. He was a little kid. But now he knows everything, he wants to see everybody. He downloaded the bible on his ipod. He was listening to it from Arizona to here because he wants to see all those places where Jesus walked, and where he was born.



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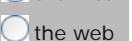
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All those places.

Q: And now?

A: And now to tell you the truth, he is scared to go anywhere. He is so scared.

Q: Is this your first experience being treated this way by the Israelis?

A: Well, to this limit. Yes.

Q: Did you have to get medical treatment?

A: When they knew that there was an Arab-American on the bridge, they took me to the manager of the bridge. He called the hospital and arranged for the medical treatment so it's on his expense. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, if I didn't have the American passport, I wouldn't get this treatment. I wouldn't get this attention but because I have an American passport and I live in the United States, they did that.

Q: Do you think this is common?

A: For any other Palestinian, they don't get anything. They just hit them and forget about it.

Q: Do you feel that the Israeli soldiers were seeing you as a Palestinian despite your American passport?

A: Yes. They didn't know that I have an American passport, but they heard me talking to my son in English and some of the girls they said 'American-Arab', and they saw the passport on the ground, and the luggage, the backpack and they noticed the American passport. It was in my hand when he hit my face.

Q: And if you were a Palestinian without an American passport, do you think you would be hit in the same way?

A: I would be hit more and I wouldn't get any treatment. That's a shame, huh?

Q: That's horrible.

A: It is.

Q: There isn't any legal recourse for Palestinians?

A: I don't think so. There are a lot of people I hear, here and there, they just get hit and they leave them. They don't care and they're not going to care about them. They are not going to take them to any doctor or get them any medical attention. They just leave them, they hit them and they walk away.

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Q: Can I ask why you originally decided to go to the United States?

A: Well I married my husband and he used to live in the Arizona, he went to study over there. All of his family used to own a house in Jerusalem. The Jewish people, or the Israeli people, took over this house and they don't have any house anymore here. So most of his family, all of his uncles, brothers, and sisters, all of them live in the United States. California Los Angeles, Arizona San Diego, and Washington. None of them are here. They used to own a big house, but not anymore. Overnight they came over and took it, and that's it. So he was over there and he visited over here because he wanted to marry a young girl back from the old country so we met and we got married and we went over there. And that was it.

Q: Do you know anything about the Israelis denying entry to Americans of Palestinian origin? Did they attempt to do that with you?

A: No, not really. They told me my son cannot go in, but because of what happened to me, because I need to go in and take medical attention they would let him in. I didn't remember that he is registered with me in my [Palestinian] ID, I didn't even think about that. He was born in the United States, in Arizona. He is American, totally, 100% American. His mom and dad, fine, they are Palestinian. In 1997 I put him on the ID with me and I forgot about that. So on the bridge they said he couldn't get in, he was supposed to go back to Jordan but because I needed medical attention, they made special arrangements and he went in with me. Other than that they would make him go back. They wouldn't have let him in.

Q: The Israelis, despite him being born in the United States, were considering him a Palestinian?

A: Yes.

Q: That seems discriminatory.

A: It is.

Q: Are you planning to file a legal appeal against the Israeli authorities?

A: Yes. I consulted a lawyer and I sent an email to the consulate in Jerusalem and I would like to press charges against this guy. To me and my son, we saw death in our eyes. A guy pointing a gun between my eyes, and with his big eyes telling me, 'If you say one word I will shoot you.' God knows, if I said something, or if I just moved a little bit, if he

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shot me, no one would know anything about this. They would say something else or they would find me a crime, say that I did this and say I deserved this, and they would cover it for him.

My son was looking at my face and my whole face was full of blood. It was a really terrible scene for my kid. And he is having nightmares on his first week. Every night he wakes up in the middle of the night and he is saying something about what is happening on the border. That is not right.

Q: I bet you are not anxious to go back across that border when you leave?

A: To tell you the truth my son is asking if we can go through Tel-Aviv, but I told me it is impossible for them to let us do that. He doesn't want to go through there again and he doesn't want to come back here again. And I don't blame him.

Q: Why would the Israelis not allow you to go through Tel-Aviv if you are both Americans?

A: Well even though we have American citizenship we're considered Palestinians. As long as we have Palestinian IDs, we're considered Palestinians, no matter what, no matter what identity or passport you have. And we're not allowed to use that as a way out.

Q: Has the American consulate been helpful?

A: They've been considerate and they wanted to know what happened. I sent them the email and he said he will look at it and we will keep in touch if there is anything that they need to know. But I told him , yes, I want to press charges and they can do whatever it takes. And they are helpful, yes. I wouldn't think they would stand by Israeli abuse.

Q: The US consulate has said in the cases where Palestinian-Americans have been denied entry that basically its not the American government's place to intervene despite the fact that it violates the US law, this discrimination against people who are American citizens based on their country of origin. Do you think that they would stand up to the abuse, when they wont stand up for Palestinian-Americans who are denied entry?

I really don't know how to answer that question, but I would rather think that they would be against this abuse. That's what I would like to think but I really don't know how to answer this question.

Q: Well, good luck, I really hope that you are able to get some justice for what happened to

all'indipendenza. Inoltre, l'Asser invita "tutti gli fornire assistenza morale e materiale movimenti di liberazione naz nei territori co

:: ONU - Risoluzione 1514

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di Domenica 25
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:: Notizie in breve
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di Sabato 24
giugno 2006 ➤

:: Notizie in breve
sull'Iraq occupato
di venerdì 23
giugno 2006 ➤

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distrutto in forma

you and your son.

A: I hope so.

Q: Thank you so much for talking to me Tina

A: No problem.

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