

...for the children

A monument of peace; an oasis of love; a garden of angels!

Rebuilding South Beirut: a call to build a "New Beirut" around a garden for children, victims of the 2006 Israeli aggression on Lebanon; the garden will be located where the "security square" used to be in the southern suburb and will house about 400 statues for children (one for each fallen child), a museum of innocence commemorating the war, and a children playground.

By Elie Al-Chaer*

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Their pictures shocked the conscience of the world;
Their faces imprinted on our collective mind;
... as their names were jotted on the little plastic shrouds that wrapped their tiny bodies.

They are the children of Lebanon "casualties of the war" between Israel and Hezbollah. The final count is not in yet; but it is said more than 400 innocent children between 0 and 13 years of age were killed. They were victims of an absurd conflict perplexing enough to the adults who try to understand it, let alone to the small innocent brains who were hurt by it. As the death machine of the earthly monster marched over their houses, schools and playgrounds - in South Lebanon, in the Southern Suburb of Beirut and in the Bekaa valley - the angels of death captured their pure souls to take them some place safer and saner where innocence can play... unharmed.



What happened to the children of Lebanon is a catastrophe of biblical proportion, akin to the slaughter of the children of Judea ordered by Herod, the Roman client-king some 2000 years ago, when he learned of the birth of a child - Messiah!

The Lebanese people may forgive but they shall never forget!

Not to exact revenge or demand compensation - we shall not be dragged into the enemy's game; we shall not stick a dagger into the heart of innocence - but to remind the world, lest it forgets, and to awaken the Human conscience, whenever it looks the other way, that war is evil and only the innocents pay its price.

My fellow Lebanese, I invite you to share with me a plea for peace, a call to honor the memory of innocence in Lebanon, and a vision of rebirth: "The Garden of Angels" and "The Innocence Museum" in a New Beirut.

The Garden of Angels

It is an idea that came to my mind as I contemplated the rebuilding of what the 2006 war in Lebanon destroyed. How shall we, descendants of great civilizations, respond to cruelty in a civilized manner?

When the enemy destroys... We build. When the enemy kills our children, we eternalize their memory by erecting a living monument to be a shining beacon of civilization and a perpetual message for Humanity to witness.

The Garden of Angels is to be a public garden built on the ruins of what used to be known as the "Security Square". It is quite a large area and rebuilding it poses a daunting challenge and a unique opportunity: a challenge to emerge from the ruins together and an opportunity to make the best of our rebirth.



The hallmark of this garden is about 400 life-size statues of children crafted, and hopefully donated, by artists of the world. Each statue will carry the name of a fallen child in the last war and a message of love and peace.

Between the statues, lush green spaces and graceful abundant fountains mask the ugliness of the rubble underneath. On the sides, playgrounds for children with different themes and different toys: sculptures, animals, and fictional characters; swings, roundabouts and playhouses.

Instead of dumping the debris into an already polluted Mediterranean Sea or wondering what to do with it, let's compact it all under this garden, building hills with hiking paths and waterslides.

Instead of underground bunkers, let us have open air green spaces.

Instead of a security zone, let us have a secure and safe playground.

Instead of a "Security Square", let us build an oasis of love and a monument of peace; a square of human entente for all time.



The Garden will have a number of gates each leading to a different section and each carrying the name of a village or a town that was destroyed: Qana, Haret Hrayk, Bint Jbeil, etc... Each gate will tell a story and opens to a theme in the garden.

The Innocence Museum

At the Northern side of the garden, stands a new "Innocence" museum dedicated to all the children of Lebanon killed in recent wars; a living interactive monument for those who survived the war to walk in the shadows of their fallen brethren as they read their names and learn their history... an account of Man's cruelty to share with those who visit Lebanon from around the world.

The "Garden of Angels" and the "Museum of Innocence" will become a focal point of tourism in Lebanon; a must see for every visitor not unlike the Roman ruins and downtown Beirut. But instead of "Coffee and Arguileh", they will offer a lesson in history and suffering, a message of love and compassion and a call for tolerance and peace.

New Beirut

On the Eastern and South-Eastern sides of the garden, soar a number of new, modern and elegant high-rises as a statement of our ability as Lebanese to rise from the ruins and reach high to the sky. They replace the destroyed residential units that used to be in and around the security square and redraw the skyline of Beirut with one of a 21st century city: "New Beirut".

No more sectarian ghettos, and no more "little Iran"; just one big Beirut with its old Downtown sector rebuilt at the end of the 20th century and its new sector "New Beirut" (formerly known as Dahieh), rebuilt at the beginning of the 21st.

This task my friends is the real test for us as a people destined to greatness and a nation certain to survive no matter what comes; it is not easy but it is doable. It will take a lot of confluence among us and a tremendous amount of administrative and urban planning to bring it about.

I submit this vision to you my beloved brethren and to the government of Mr. Siniora for consideration and action.

We have been generous with our blood and tears, let's not be frugal with our sweat.

Join together and let us brainstorm on how to make this vision a reality and bring about an oasis of love and peace in a New Beirut.

... for the children.

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