

Panel Presentation at the Left Forum, June 3, 2017 held at John Jay College in NYC.

In year three of the largest world refugee crisis since WW II, the Trump/Pence regime has targeted refugees as a dangerous immigrant grouping. As was said by the presidential candidate himself: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." Stepping back to the previous administrations, Bush launched an illegitimate, unjust, immoral "war on terror" to last generations. Obama expanded the targeted countries beyond Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq to Pakistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan. What are the connections between U.S. wars of aggression and mass migrations from war?

Debra Sweet, Director, World Can't Wait

Sallie Latch, Artist, volunteer with refugees in Greece

Ed Kinane, Anti-Militarist Activist

Filmed and edited by **Cat April Watters**

Below is a text version of Sallie Latch's presentation.

I Asked and This is What I Heard

It was one week before the EU-Turkey deal that was devised to keep millions trying to escape death and destruction from entering Europe. These desperate people were trying to escape wars and economic exploitation largely due to the meddling and deadly intrusions instigated and carried out by the U.S. and its European allies. But I am not here to talk about that.

I'm here to paint a verbal picture of people like you and me, who are living lives of untold misery. What does it look like? How does it feel? If it was you whose life was suddenly interrupted by bombs, rockets, gunfire, kidnapping, a home destroyed, all possessions gone, a child burned alive, a husband decapitated, all your four children blasted away by a barrel bomb... what would that feel like? What would it feel like to gather whoever was left of your family, collect a pair of socks, a t-shirt, a favorite family photo and say goodbye to all you had

ever known and loved?

You seek safety, which means getting to the border, a death-defying feat. The roads are blocked. You try to make your way through mountains of rubble, dodge bullets fired by warring rebel groups, and hope you're not killed by bombs exploding around you. You pay a smuggler to lead you past ISIS or Taliban territory. After many terrifying hours, somehow you arrive at the border. At last you are safe.

Well. Not quite. You don't have a visa or even a passport. Of course you can't enter. So sorry. You aren't wanted here. No one wants you.

To make sure you know this, a human-like monster with a gun pointed at you, screams and dares you to enter his piece of the planet. You beg to cross into his space. He jams a rifle into your gut. An 8-year old boy standing next to you is shot in the stomach. You watch as a stream of blood drifts down his leg. He keels over. You panic. You try to help. You can't. Your smuggler moves fast and pays several hundred dollars to the guards and you cross over. You are safe now. Or are you?

Your smuggler, who is not your friend and therefore can't be completely trusted, leads you through a thick forest, with wild animals and soldiers hunting you down. You follow him and trudge on, quickly at night in total darkness. It's so dark you can only know where to step by following the sounds of those in front of you.

If you travel in the winter, there is deep snow and freezing weather to battle. Your skimpy shoes and thin jacket won't keep away the icy cold and so you get frostbite. You're weak. You falter and fall. You lie there and watch as others move on. You force yourself up, stumble, and keep going. You pass a mother 8 1/2 months pregnant lying helpless in the snow. She is alone with her four children. You want to help her. But you don't. You move on, passing dead bodies on the way. You feel guilty, but you must save yourself.

You have been walking for 11 hours with no food or water and murderous soldiers to avoid. Maybe your daughters are not raped. But you're afraid your smuggler is part of a gang that wants to kill you and cut out your body parts for profit. They pay well on the black market.

Somehow you survive the journey and you decide to stop in Istanbul to earn some money. You need it because your wife is pregnant and waiting for you in Greece. You work 10-14 hour days doing dirty, hard work for about a \$10 a day. You are illegal so of course your employer will take advantage of this. If he doesn't pay you, there is nothing you can do. But you continue, worried about your wife. Finally, you try to get to her. You try many times. But each time you are caught by the police. You are thrown in jail, beaten with clubs and kicked until you are covered in blood. They let you out and you try again. Each time you are arrested, put in jail and beaten bloody. You keep trying and finally, on the 10th try, you dodge the bullets, the police, the thugs and you reach Izmir, Turkey. Izmir where smugglers hunt you down and entice you with a deal to get you to Samos... Samos, the Greek island where you will find your wife and together you will make your way into Europe, the promised land.

Well, not quite. The smuggler, for a price, arranges a small rubber dinghy, one that ordinarily holds about 20 people. Wanting as much money as possible, he forces 50, maybe even more into the space. You may refuse to get in, but the pistol he's waving at you changes your mind. Hopefully, the life jacket you bought is real, not filled with straw or styrofoam.

You get in the dinghy. The smuggler stays on the shore. He points to a far off light and tells you to get to it... that's your destination. But you don't know how to steer the dinghy and you've never seen the sea before. You can't swim. Your children are crying. You're terrified. The dinghy is so crowded it sinks down to the water line. Water gets in. The sea is rough and the boat rocks back and forth. It's pitch dark and you must not make a sound for fear of being caught by the police who are looking for you. Suddenly the engine stops. It's run out of gas. You are going nowhere. You wait in the blackness... You use the light on your cell phone hoping rescuers from the Greek side of the sea will see you. But it's too late. The dinghy suddenly flies through the air, tipping over, trapping your beloved mother, two sisters, and a brother underneath. They are devoured by the vicious hungry sea. The next time you see them they are mangled corpses washed up on a beach.

Eventually, the Greek Coast Guard finds you. They are kind, and caring. They take you to the shore where police are waiting for you. They take your name, fingerprint you, ask a few questions, write something in a language you don't understand and hand you a piece of paper. You are now registered. You are now officially an Asylum Seeker. Not the car mechanic, hairdresser, lawyer, musician, student, housewife, teacher or whoever you used to be.

You are put into a van and driven out of town, far up a secluded hill. The van stops and you get

out. You see a chain link fence topped by barbed wire put there to rip your flesh apart. Hundreds of people are inside, some clinging to the fence and shouting: "Salaam-Alaikum my friend. Welcome to prison!"

"Prison?" Yes, prison.

You are confused. You ask yourself, "Why am I a prisoner? What have I done? I didn't murder anyone, drop 20,000-pound bombs, cut off heads, torture anyone. I didn't enslave workers. I didn't make deals with ISIS or the Taliban. I didn't sell weapons to hated dictators or to both sides of a conflict. Why am I being sent into this crowded noisy stinking place, a garbage pit made for 400, now crowded with over 2000 desperate hopeless men, women, and children who stand in line for hours to get insect-infested slimy pasta and potatoes and wait months, if not years to learn if they will be granted asylum or be sent to Turkey and to prison?

Some choose suicide.

The gate is slammed shut behind you.

You're dazed. It will take weeks before you realize what has happened to you.

What has happened to you is that forces beyond your control have visions of power and conquest, to say nothing of untold riches. In the process millions have been displaced, killed, drowned. But it doesn't matter.

There are high officials in far off places in fine suits, posing and grinning for photo ops. They aren't concerned about you. They are concerned about getting elected, getting promoted, saving their jobs and their influence. They gather together and drum up fears about you, your religion, your strange dress and odd habits. They perform on television, pontificate and warn

about your desire to take over the world and destroy us. You are the dreaded enemy, to be feared, to be kept in your place, to be locked up, to be drowned... How else can we maintain our perfect culture, our very civilized way of life?

How else can those in power stay there?

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