

Lebanon

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Julia Boutros singing a song praising the Palestinian uprising. WAM

'My songs have always called for peace'

By Zoi Constantine, Staff Reporter

Dubai: Two weeks ago, Julia Boutros was enjoying being back home with family and friends in a resurgent Lebanon.

Today, she finds herself going from shelter to shelter, handing out blankets and food to people who have lost everything; many of whom fled their homes with only the clothes on their backs.

Famed throughout the Arab world for her nationalistic songs, such as Ghabet Shams Al Haq (The Sun of Truth has Disappeared), Boutros has temporarily put her career on hold to remain in her country and do her part for the humanitarian effort.

Describing what is going on in Lebanon, Boutros says that she is in the midst of a "massacre that is taking place in front of the eyes of the world".

"It is a massacre that is just being watched by the UN and many Arab leaders, where children and women are being killed," she said from Beirut.

"There is mass killing going on. If you come to Lebanon, it is not the same as you see it on television; it is as if a nuclear bomb has been dropped on my country."

Boutros has been coordinating desperately needed aid sent from the UAE by the Emirati-Lebanese Friendship Association (EFLA).

However, as Boutros and the EFLA volunteers work tirelessly to deliver supplies, frustration is mounting about the inability to get aid to besieged areas.

Efforts are underway to access areas of southern Lebanon, including Saida, but constant Israeli shelling and the destroyed infrastructure has made this increasingly difficult.

"We are trying to get as far south as possible, trying to work between the bombs, to reach all the regions in need. When we ask people what they need, they start crying, saying that when they were in their villages, they didn't need anything. They feel humiliated."

Boutros has been travelling to locations where more than twenty internally displaced people (IDPs) are living in only two rooms. One thing is very clear: they want the world to know what is happening.

"It is their right to fight and to exist. There is great support for the Lebanese resistance led by Hezbollah and we need the world to know that we are united and are going to get through this situation.

"Food is a great need, but what are also needed are blankets and mattresses to sleep on. Thousands of families are stranded in parks, sleeping on the grass or wherever there is space. It is truly miserable. Yesterday, I met an eight-year-old girl whose father and brother had been killed. She was in complete shock. I asked her what happened and she could tell me everything except about their deaths."

Despite the difficulties being faced by those on the ground, Boutros is determined to remain in Lebanon.

"I will be here for as long as it takes. We are determined to help and stay and fight in our own way. My songs have always called for peace and justice, and human rights," she said.

Through the words of a singer

- 1980s Lebanese Civil War, Ghabet Shams Al Haq (The Sun of Truth has Disappeared)
- 1987 First Palestinian Intifada, Wayn Al Malayeen (Where Are the Millions)
- 2000 Liberation of south Lebanon, Nasheed Al Hurriya (Anthem of Freedom)

Phenomenal response from UAE

According to the Emirati-Lebanese Friendship Association (EFLA), over 120 tonnes of aid has already reached Lebanon, with another 120 due to reach besieged areas in the next week.

"Our efforts to send humanitarian aid to the needy are continuing everyday and we are also taking part in the telethon 'The Emirates Campaign to Heal Lebanon's Wound,' on Friday," said EFLA's Joe Ghossoub.

"The response from the UAE has been phenomenal. Everyday we are seeing more carloads of goods coming in to the American University of Dubai."

According to Ghossoub, the items which are most needed include soap, detergents, antiseptics and diapers, among many other things. EFLA is also focusing on sending medicine through the UAE Red Crescent Authority (RCA).

"We are all taking part in these efforts, because most of us have family in Lebanon. But, this is not the only issue; fundamentally it is our duty to help the humanitarian cause," he said.