

“Clean Shelter: Sustainability starts with survival, Seba AbuDaqa”, 17.7.2025

Lecture

Thank you for this gathering. We are sorry that Tom [Kellner] is not with us today. There was a scheduling error in our calendar, and she is not home yet. And I apologize for this. My name is Seba AbuDaqa. I was born and raised in Gaza. I got my education at Birzeit University in the West Bank, for anthropology and sociology. I did my Masters degree in human rights and democratization, and I have been working for 20 years in the community empowerment and sustainable development sector, in many organizations, regional, with a special focus on MENA [Middle East-North Africa] and the Euro-Mediterranean region. I met Tom [Kellner] on October 8th, 2023 — just one day after the war started. I was in a bad position since my family was in Gaza and I was very worried about them. I was trying to run in many different directions in order to make connection for the people in Gaza to the electricity because I have some background in solar energy and have some experience, and we do have some assets in Gaza as a family that I tried to connect to hospitals.

And Tom, when we met and I told her about what I am trying to do, she asked me to help, and that was really sweet and very kind. I had many Israeli friends before, but I have never managed to work with any Israeli people, because I didn't find before a person [with whom I] share perspective, motivation and approach. We, Tom and I, have a lot of similarities mainly that we both live today, we both know the history really well, and we both think of the future, of course, but we live today and focus on survival because sustainability starts with survival. Tom asked me to do a need assessment in order to start with the focus. And we did, I did a need assessment just quick one by phone with family and friends living in Gaza, and all told me that everybody forgot about toilets. We need toilets and we started to fundraise and just send money to some volunteers to build toilets and to send us pictures of course.

And from there I do have connections. I connect only with people that I trust and I know that they will do what they said they were doing you know. And little by little, you know, everybody knows that, an Israeli woman with a Palestinian woman is something like very sexy for everyone, and then we got a lot of donations and then we decided that we need to register, we need to have a perspective, we need to have a vision and a mandate. Otherwise, we will be just scattered and unable to achieve anything. And here we are now at “Clean Shelter”, an organization that focuses on humanitarian response, crisis response, with focus on clean shelter, sanitation, and shelter solutions as well. And nowadays actually we are focusing a little bit more on sustainability, because when there are crises especially when [the situation] is like in Gaza, then you cannot think of sustainability you barely find anything in the market, and you cannot get things from outside, and we cannot think about sustainability.

Last year we provided water. We bought a lot of water, we paid a lot of money to get water for the people and we ended up with no assets. And then we started navigating for an interim solution that is not very sustainable, but still sustainable for at least 2 years. They can get water and it is sustainable for them within this [period of time] as long as they survive. We do not know for how long it's going to continue, and many of the people that I know who volunteer, or used to volunteer with us just passed away. So now there are concrete actions mainly, as we speak, that we do navigate and do surveys for water wells, and then we install desalination units, and we create little networks of pipelines in order to provide people in al-Mawasi or displaced people with clean water to drink, as well as water well for daily use. So, we can get it desalinated for drinking and for people to use it every day.

Water and sanitation is a women's issue. Of course men drink water, they are human beings as well. But I mean sanitation and hygiene and privacy, toilets is also affecting women in a bad way, and women would need privacy. That is why we, Tom and I, feel that we want to focus and offer our

work and our services to the most vulnerable people especially women. That is why in parallel we are establishing our first protection camp for households led by women. But not only, also for vulnerable people, elderly people who are left behind who do not have any of their family members still alive, and who are all alone, people with disabilities. But mainly the community that is managing this camp is a community of women who lost their husbands or partners and they have to take care of their kids alone in these dire situations.

Please look at our website [<https://www.cleanshelter.org/aboutus>] there is our annual report about 2024, the time we have done a lot of activities and services, like in schools, providing of winter clothes, rehabilitation of tents and providing camps and building toilets, delivering water, many activities that we have done since we started in January 2024. I would invite you to read our annual report for 2024, and also read our newsletter [<https://www.cleanshelter.org/news>]. We have done three newsletters since the beginning of this year. You can find them on our website and please reach out to us at any time. You will find our emails Tom and I have access to, and we answer people shortly after we receive the email. If you do have any question and also ideas and suggestions, we also welcome ideas and suggestions. Many people helped us also to find better solutions, to find our way to get more funds and more sustainable projects, and to be able to pay our team in Gaza and also to pay ourselves. Still we are on this way. We are now paying our team in Gaza, but we are on our way to find also core-fund so that Tom and I could be paid, because we are full-time with “Clean Shelter” and we didn't do any other things for a living.

Thank you.