

The Idealist

By Newsletter Staff



Kathy Kelly

Photo: Voices for Creative Nonviolence. vcnv.org

Kathy Kelly is a remarkable woman opposed to military madness who operates outside the political constraints of Congress. She doesn't even pay taxes so as not to be complicit in foreign policy to which she objects. The constraints she faces in her work are, instead, the inertia of the U.S. public in the face of the military madness that she has not only witnessed but experienced firsthand in many visits to foreign lands that have been overt and covert targets of U.S. sanctions, sieges, and weapons.

The word "idealist" has many interpretations but most generally refers to someone guided more by ideals than practical considerations. Given the current political environment and the disengagement of much of the American public from their government's foreign or domestic policy, Kelly's vision certainly falls within that definition. And to those not interested in improving circumstances, such idealism is dismissed as naïve.

But Kelly is far from naïve: she has frequently positioned herself in the eye of the storm to try to stop war and advocate for its victims and potential victims, bringing their stories back to the source from which war originated. She lived in Gaza in 2009 while bombs fell from Israel's Operation Cast Lead (The U.S. rushed weapons for Israel's use.), sailed on the Audacity of Hope in an attempt to break the siege of Gaza in 2011, and returned in 2012 to meet the survivors of Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense attacks. She was familiar with the effects of a siege from her experience living in Iraq during the Sanctions Period, when so many needed items were forbidden entrance to Iraq that 500,000 children died under those conditions of deprivation. During that time, her Chicago-based organization, Voices in the Wilderness (later renamed Voices for Creative Nonviolence), put together 70 delegations that openly defied the sanctions to bring medicines to children.

In 2003, she experienced the "Shock and Awe" campaign in Iraq and, more recently, the ongoing war in Afghanistan, where she was the frequent, long-term guest of the

young Afghan Peace Volunteers, helping facilitate their outreach to the world. She was sentenced to prison for planting corn on missile silo sites in protest of the U.S. killing of innocent people with drones, and for trespassing at the Ft. Benning military training school, the School of Americas (SOA/WHINSEC). She emerged from prison with more stories—that of concern for the prison population and the system of injustice that incarcerates so many women.

Ever the realist but hopeful about the ability of others to act on ideals as well, Kathy Kelly said: “It’s hard to look in the mirror and see lost opportunities to be peacemakers. But we can become rehabilitated, as a society, transformed from a menacing, fearsome empire in decline into a society that earnestly wants to align with people dedicated to building peaceable societies.”



On the 21st of September 2015, the International Day of Peace, the Afghan Peace Volunteers will launch #Enough!, a global campaign to abolish war encouraging all members of the human family to sign The People’s Agreement to Abolish War. APV says, “It’s not a petition, because we feel that we don’t need permission to live without war, especially from the elite who are the ones who keep waging wars.”

Photo: ourjourneytosmile.org