

Justice for Aafia US Tour Diary: Day 2 - Coney Island

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
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What a small world we live in.

Last night as I addressed members of the Pakistan community in Coney Island, retired general Pervez Musharraf was hosting a private dinner for a select group of his wealthy supporters.

We were both raising funds - he, allegedly, to launch a new party and a brand new political career while I was hoping to raise funds for Dr Aafia Siddiqui and other Muslims in need of legal support.

With some mild amusement I reflected one event was for a fugitive from justice while the other was for a victim of injustice, adding with further irony that Aafia is where she is today because of General Musharraf.

By his own admission in his autobiography *In The Line of Fire*, he reveals in details how his administration was responsible for selling hundreds of Muslims to the Americans for millions of dollars.

Allowing him to return to Pakistan to revive his political ambitions would be like inviting Herod to open a childrens' nursery in Pindi!

I'm not sure who turned up to the other event, but our fundraiser was attended by genuine brothers and sisters who care about the plight of Aafia and they genuinely want to help.

They know the day Aafia is freed is the day that some pride and honour will be restored to Pakistan ... a great country which has been badly represented by a series of rotten and corrupt regimes.

There were some interesting questions from the audience last night directed at Muslim Legal Fund of America - not least of all why is it still fund-raising for Aafia when the Pakistan government has taken the unprecedented step of paying \$2m for her legal team.

The answer is very simple. We learned that getting justice for Aafia is just the start of a gargantuan battle - once she is released, insh'Allah, we want to be able to reunite her with her family - ALL of her family including two of her three children who are still missing.

Someone, somewhere knows the whereabouts of the two children Maryam and Sulaiman and despite the best efforts of Aafia's family to track them down professional help is needed.

I also believe that someone from US intelligence has the answers but is keeping quiet, however they are sitting on a ticking time bomb. Two of those children are US citizens and the kidnap of US citizens by US authorities will not be tolerated. It is a step too far.

Snatching their mother from a taxi in Karachi, dumping her in Bagram and developing a whole programme of torture is one thing, but kidnapping wholly innocent children - American citizens at that - is unacceptable, even by the basement standards set by the Bush Administration.

New man Barack Obama said "sunlight is the best disinfectant" before he came to office and he is right. The time has now come for full transparency.

Let's bring an end to this Mickey Mouse trial of Aafia - an interesting analogy when you consider I'm in the land where the Disney Corporation is founded.

Let's make dua for a 'happy ever after' scenario from the nightmare which has visited the Siddiqui family.

* Yvonne Ridley leaves New York and is heading south tomorrow - for more information visit www.mlfausa.org