

To the Shores of Tripoli
By Carah Ong¹

While governments and political systems may come and go, it is relationships with people that last.



From 29 June to 11 July, I had the opportunity to participate in the first non-governmental delegation to Libya (the Great Jamahiriyan Society) since the US lifted its more than 20 year embargo on the country in April 2004. The purpose of the trip was to learn about Libya first-hand and establish people to people relations. The delegation consisted of 12 Americans and one Canadian, all from various non-governmental organizations. The

World Constitution and Parliament Association organized the US delegates and the Revolutionary Committees Movement was the organizer for Libya. During the trip, many dialogues and discussions were held on the topics of Democracy, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Terrorism and US Foreign Policy from an Arabic point of view. In addition to the dialogues, the delegation also had the opportunity to visit the National Center for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control (NCIDC), the Tripoli Medical Center, the General Teachers' Syndicate, the General Forum for Arab-African Non-Governmental Organizations and the ancient Roman cities of Leptis Magna and Sabratha as well as the cities of Abu Aisha and Shabiyat (city) Zauiya.



In meeting with many Libyans, what I was most impressed with was their ability to distinguish between governments and people. On many occasions it was repeated that while governments may come and go, it is relationships between peoples that last. It is so important not to stereotype people based on the actions of their government, but to see people for who they are as human beings.

The Importance of Green



As one reads this report, one may find that the word “green” appears often. In Libya, the color green is extremely significant. Green, the color of an oasis in the desert, is a symbol of security and prosperity. Libya’s flag is green. Muammer Al Qathafi’s philosophy for establishing the Great Jamahiriya is called “The Green Book.” In June 1988, the Peoples’ General Conference of the Great Jamahiriya adopted the “Great Green Charter of Human Rights.” The center of Tripoli is called the “Green Square.” (pictured left)

The Green Book

Written by Muammar Al Qathafi, Part One of *The Green Book* (pictured right) heralded the start of the Jamahiriya, or state of the masses. Part Two offers socialism as a solution to the world's economic problems. Part Three elaborates a platform for social revolution. In Libya, Qathafi is venerated as the leader of the Revolution and the proponent of the state of the masses.



Picture of a painting of Muammar Al Qathafi.

The Revolutionary Committees Movement

The Revolutionary Committees Movement (RCM) is a political and cultural movement that calls for and promotes the establishment of the Jamahiriyan society – the authority of the people (direct democracy) – as presented by the Third Universal Theory of The Green Book. In the Great Jamahiriyan society, the people exercise direct democracy by means of basic peoples' conferences that include the entire population of the country. The people

select executive peoples' committees that function under their supervision and execute their decisions without any form of representation or mandate, thereby annulling the rule of an individual, a class, a sect, a party or a number of parties. RCM members participate in the peoples' conferences to assure that the authority of the people is never undermined. The RCM does not exercise power or seek to ascend to power. Rather, the RCM's primary function is to incite the masses to exercise power. The RCM also ensures that those who control resources do not control the Peoples' Conferences. Anyone can be a member of the RCM provided that they believe in never giving up the power of the people.

Direct Democracy



In Arabic, Jamahiriya is a word that describes a political and economic system for and by the masses. Libya has been practicing a direct democracy for the more than 20 years. While The Green Book gives an outline, it is up to the people to make decisions for themselves. The people believe that if you belong to a political party, you are not free. Direct democracy is an experiment of bringing the functions of members of parliament (or Congress) to the people.

Peoples' Conferences are the legislative branch in Libya and occur two to three times per year in Libya. The conferences last five to six days maximum with three hours

each day. The number of Peoples' Conferences in each Shabirat (city) and the budget for each depends on the population of the city. The people who participate in each conference decide upon an agenda and discuss it article by article. If the people want more detailed information on an issue before making a decision, they can select someone to write a briefing on the issue and then bring it back to the peoples' conference.

The people select a secretary who takes notes at these conferences on what is discussed and decided. Every individual has a chance to discuss the issues on the agenda and present their views. The secretary who takes notes drafts a consensus document based on what is discussed during the conference and presents it to the people for adoption. The secretary has no right to change or modify what the people discuss or decide. Secretaries keep people on topic and agenda. If a conference is too large, the secretary can divide it into three gatherings and ask two people to help facilitate. Some women do not feel comfortable participating with the men, so sometimes the conference will propose a separate session for women. Secretaries are not paid.

Peoples' Committees are responsible for executing decisions made at Peoples' Conferences. Libya has a judicial system like the US, but it does not have a jury system. The Justice Department has written procedures for appointing judges and different judges are selected to oversee a case based on the degree of the crime. Defendants can request a private trial, but they must have a good reason. Based upon the French judicial system, Libya has a primary court, an appeal court and a supreme court.

In the philosophy of the Jamahiriyan society, there must be a liberation of needs (i.e. resources must be shared) so that those with economic power do not dominate or rule the society. Today, there are organizations in 28 countries spanning the African continent calling for the implementation of direct democracies within their countries.

Libya and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Libya has signed and ratified all conventions related to weapons of mass destruction, including: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1975); the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (2004); the Biological Weapons Convention (1982); the Geneva Protocol (1971); the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993); the Treaty of Pelindaba to establish a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Africa (1996); the Partial Test Ban Treaty; and the Missile Code of Conduct (December 2003).

Weapons of Mass Destruction are the topic of the time. The US went to war against Iraq because it claimed that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. Libya's vision is a world free of weapons of mass destruction and it gave up its nuclear weapons program in December 2003 because of this vision. Contrary to US claims and reports in the media, officials said that Libya did not give up its nuclear program because of the war on Iraq nor because it was afraid of a US preemptive strike. Libya desires to be a model for other countries to get rid of nuclear weapons. In Article 24 of Libya's Great Green Charter on Human Rights adopted on 12 June 1988, Libya proclaimed, "The members of the Jamahiriyan society call for the suppression of nuclear, bacteriological and chemical

weapons, as well as of any other means of massive extermination and destruction. They call for the elimination of all existing stocks, for the preservation of mankind against the dangers represented by the waste from nuclear power plants.” The decision to abandon the nuclear weapons program was discussed during three closed sessions (no media) of the Peoples’ Conferences.

Libya is currently working towards developing a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (ME NWFZ). Libyans believe that Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons is a threat to all countries in the region, and that Israel must join in working to establish a ME NWFZ. The US has turned a blind eye to Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons and focused on preventing Arab countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The existing world system is one in which bullies are rewarded and must change so that countries do not seek to acquire nuclear weapons and use them as bargaining chips. Comprehensive disarmament should be imposed on the strong, not just the weak.

American Foreign Policy: An Arab Point of View

After the end of World War II, the Middle East became significant to the US for two reasons:

1. Oil – the US now imports around half of its oil needs from the Middle East.
2. The Middle East became an economic market for the US.

The Middle East also became the first line of defense for the US against the Soviet Union and therefore the US gave the Middle East priority in its foreign policy. It was only after the fall of the Soviet Union that people around the world began to see the dark side of the US. The fall of the Soviet Union demonstrated that the invader could be defeated by the invaded.

Over the last few decades, the Israeli factor has created a contradiction and greatly distorted US relations with Arab countries in the Middle East. Many Arab countries believe that without Israel, the US and Arab countries would be on friendly terms. US foreign policy is not well accepted in the region because of the bias toward Israel. However, Libyans stated that there is not one country in the Middle East that does not recognize the sovereignty of Israel. Libya’s proposed solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is the creation of one state of Isratine (see below for more information).

For many Arab countries, it has become an honor to struggle against the US. They believe that it is the responsibility of people everywhere to stand up and struggle against any country that wishes to dominate the world. While many countries want to make love with the Middle East, it is widely believed in the Middle East that the US wants to rape the region.

From the Arab point of view, the US invasion of Iraq on the pretense that it had weapons of mass destruction was a falsification. The real reason for the US invasion, they believe, is to dominate the region in order to gain access to Central Asia because of the region’s oil reservoir. No longer does anyone in the Middle East believe in US democracy,

particularly after the scandals in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. People of the Middle East believe that what the world needs most is for the US to be held accountable. People believe that America has lost the spirit and soul of its revolution. They also believe that the US has many rivals and it will not dominate forever, and that in today's globalized world, no country can live isolated from the rest of the world.

Libya has an interest for its own people to make concessions to the US and the government believes that it must work its way through the fact that the US has total global control. Libyans also believe that American citizens are the first victims of the American empire.

Terrorism

Terrorism is widespread and not limited to certain countries or cultures. Terrorism has become one of the most pressing issues of our time and we must urgently do something about it. In general, it is difficult to define terrorism. Even the United Nations could not come to an agreement on the definition of terrorism.

Today, the main source of conflict is between forces of domination and forces of the suppressed. Violence comes from a feeling of hopelessness. Violence has become the voice of the voiceless. The root cause of terrorism is the inequity of power.

Libyans view Al Qaeda as a creation of the West to discredit Islam. The Qu'ran is the main source of law in Libya and it prohibits violence. Islam is a peaceful religion and Al Qaeda is merely an extremist group that has distorted the religion for its own purposes.

The existence of nuclear weapons is also viewed as terrorism. The only solution to terrorism is complete disarmament and the international rule of law.

Solution to the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Libya has submitted a proposed solution to the Israel-Palestine Conflict in a White Book entitled, "Isratine." Based on its view of the historical reality of the situation, Libya believes that the solution is the creation of one state that would be called Isratine. According to the White Book, the land area is too narrow for two states. Additionally, two states would remain in conflict with each other as each believes they form part of the land of the other and therefore each state would continue to feel threatened. The creation of two states would not be able to absorb either Jewish immigrants or Palestinian refugees. Both Israel and Palestine also have settlements on the land of the other. At least one million Palestinians live in the state of Israel and some half million Israelis live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The creation of one state would enforce mutual reliance, if not integration, in respect to goods and services.

In order for the state of Isratine to be established, Libyans believe that it is imperative to return Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their homes. Free elections could occur under UN supervision and allow for the establishment of proportional

representation of Israelis and Palestinians under a single government. Weapons of mass destruction must also be removed from the state and completely from the Middle East. Libyans believe that a Jewish state alone will always be exposed to the Arab and Islamic threat. However, a single assimilated state comprised of Muslims, Jews, Arabs and Israelis would never be threatened and the peoples would be far more secure.

National Center for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control (NCIDC)



Based in Tripoli, the National Center for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control (NCIDC) was established in October 2002. The purpose of the NCIDC is to propose national guidelines and legislation on infectious disease prevention and control; extend a program of immunization across the country; and provide surveillance and early warning of epidemics. Negative relations with the US greatly affected medical care in

Libya and the country effectively had to completely restart its medical infrastructure during the 80s. During the US sanctions on Libya, Germany was the most helpful country in providing support to rebuild the medical infrastructure.

There is no cost for healthcare in Libya; it is free to all citizens. There are 1.3 doctors, 4.3 nurses and 2.3 pharmacists per 1,000 people in Libya. The country has 620 hospitals.

The average life expectancy in Libya is 76 for women and 65 for men. The first cause of death in Libya is car accidents. The second leading cause of death is heart disease and the third is cancer. Libya has a high level of infant mortality with 24 infant deaths per 1,000 births. Libya has eliminated leprosy and will be declared polio-free by September 2004. HIV is considered a problem in Libya, with 2,393 cases on record in 2003. HIV cases are mainly caused by intravenous drug use (as opposed to being sexually transmitted).

The goals of the NCIDC in 2004 include: establishing a public health laboratory by August 2004; completing a national database of infectious diseases with an electronic network by September 2004; adopting Foreigners Health Certificate legislation by September 2004; adopting HIV and Hepatitis legislation by September 2004; finalizing a national survey for HIV and Hepatitis by August 2004; and establishing local HIV committees in each Shabiyat (city) by December 2004. Now that sanctions have been lifted, the NCIDC will also be collaborating with the US to train people in epidemic outbreak investigation and control, to establish protocols for blood and laboratory safety and to train people in infectious disease diagnosis.

General Forum for Arab-African Non-Governmental Organizations

The General Forum for Arab-African Non-Governmental Organizations was founded in April 2000 to enforce the role of Arab and African peoples. The secretariat is based in Tripoli. It deals with issues of poverty, famine, illiteracy, women's issues, epidemics and diseases. It has more than 420 member non-governmental organizations that span the

African continent. The General Forum works also to support the African Union that was launched in September 1999.

The General Teacher's Syndicate in Great Jamahiriya

The General Teacher's Syndicate in Great Jamahiriya is an association to which all Libyan teachers of the primary and secondary levels of education belong. Its secretariat is based in Tripoli and consists of a secretary-general, secretary assistant, foreign affairs secretary, information and animation secretary and organizing membership secretary.

The Syndicate focuses its work on programs to qualify and evaluate the competence of all primary and secondary level teachers. It also offers programs to support teachers. There are more than 250,000 members of the Syndicate. The Syndicate is extremely interested in adopting peace education curricula to implement in Libyan classrooms. Currently, non-violence and conflict resolution are taught in the classroom.

In Libya, primary level is grades 0 through eight and the secondary level is grades nine through twelve. Students are required to take an exam to advance to the next grade level. Children are allowed to be home schooled for up to six years, but all home schooled children are required to take examinations with all other students in order to advance to each grade level. At the secondary level, students have the option to attend technical and vocational schools if they do not wish to continue on to a university once they have completed the secondary level of education.

The Great Man-Made River Project

The Great Man-Made River (GMMR) Project is the largest underground pipeline project in the world. The project began in September 1984 and is currently transferring more than 6.5 million liters of water per day from the Kufra and Sareer Basins beneath the earth's surface in Libya's desert region to the coastal concentration of populations in Benghazi, Sirte and Tripoli.

To date, with the completion of the first two of three phases, the GMMR project has drilled more than 1,500 wells with depths varying from 450 to 650 meters. The network of wells covers an area of 8000 square kilometers. Eight kilometers of carbonized metal wire is wound around each pipe segment and the amount of wire used in the first phase of the project alone is sufficient to encircle the globe 230 times. The volume of water in the reservoir in the Kufra basin alone exceeds the amount of water that would flow from the Nile basin in 220 years. The volume of water that flows daily from this artificial river is equal to half the amount of oil produced daily all over the world. The stone and sand used to manufacture the pipes would be enough to build 16 of the Giza Pyramids in Egypt. More than five million tons of concrete were used to construct the pipeline and if linearly extended, the pipeline would reach from Sirte, Libya to Mumbai, India. Pipe transporters have traveled the equivalent of to the sun and back. It takes nine days for water to journey from the Kufra and Sareer Basins to Benghazi, Sirte and Tripoli.



(Pictured left to right: Abu Aisha water reservoir; Abu Aisha farm project; Farmer with tractor)

Some 70 percent of the daily usage of the water is devoted to agricultural projects. The American delegation visited one agricultural project that has benefited from the GMMR in Abu Aisha, located 60 kilometers south of Tripoli. Abu Aisha has 8,795 hectares of land, 3,325 of which are irrigated by the GMMR. The land has been divided up into 665 farms and more than 280,000 trees have been planted around these farms to attract further rainfall. Farmers do not live on or own the land, but they cultivate it and pay for water usage and then sell the agricultural products.

Cultural Experiences

While in Libya, the American delegation was treated to many traditional cultural experiences and traditional Libyan meals in the ancient Roman cities of Leptis Magna and Sabratha as well as in the cities of Abu Aisha and Shabiyat (city) Zauiya. In each city, the delegation was greeted with traditional Libyan folkloric music and had the opportunity to meet with local governmental officials. The delegation was also able to visit the local market in Tripoli. Members of the delegation also visited the site of the US and UK bombing of Qathafi's home where his two-year-old daughter died.

 <p>Market in Tripoli</p>	 <p>Folkloric welcome in Leptis Magna</p>
 <p>Market in Tripoli</p>	 <p>Traditional music at dinner on the Mediterranean</p>

Media

In Zauiya, I had the opportunity to be interviewed on the local radio station (pictured right) to discuss my impressions of the country. Reports of the activities and meetings of the delegation also appeared daily on the national media.



Conclusion

I was very impressed with the social and economic strides that the people of Libya have taken despite US sanctions. In speaking with people in the market and on the streets, I discovered that Libyans are very positive about Americans and they gave us a warm welcome wherever we visited. People thanked me for coming to their country and expressed how glad they are that relations are beginning to normalize between the US and Libyan governments. For me, this trip underlined the importance of people to people relations. While governments and political systems may come and go, it is relationships with people that last. I was often reminded of a Maori proverb I frequently quote, “He aha te nui mea o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata,” which translates, “What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, the people, the people.”

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