

Playgrounds for Palestine: One Marathon at a Time

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My right knee is wrapped. My left ankle is iced. I lost the nail on my right big toe, and have about 20 blisters and a similar number of bruises on both of my feet. This doesn't even begin to convey half of the story of the punishment that my body has been subjected to in recent months. Why, you ask? Because I will join Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian American activist, writer and founder of Playgrounds for Palestine - www.playgroundsforpalestine.org - in running the Philadelphia Marathon on November 23. Our goal is to raise enough money to build a large playground in a Palestinian refugee camp, likely in Lebanon. We are more than half of the way there, but have about 5,000 dollars to go.

I ran a full marathon before (the Vancouver Marathon in Canada in May 2008). I finished at a 4:10:29 and intended to break the four-hour mark in the next run. But since then, I sustained a knee injury. Compounded with an old back injury, training for the Philly Marathon has been much harder than I thought it would be.

I try to maintain a 40 miles per week running routine and juggle many hours of writing, editing, interviews, travel and public speaking events at the same time. Needless to say, it's been really tough. But I had a cure to keep me motivated. Before every major run, especially when I am feeling particularly demoralized, I visit www.playgroundsforpalestine.org.

Pictures of Palestinian children enjoying the many playgrounds that this organization has already established inspire me to trot on. I was born and raised in a refugee camp in Gaza, and truly understand what these playgrounds mean for the children.

My last a major runs in the last two weeks were around 13, 15 and finally 20 miles each. I think I am ready for Philadelphia, but still, we don't half enough to build that playground in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Today, I read a new report filed from Nahr Al Bared refugee camp in Lebanon. The camp was entirely destroyed during a recent fight between the Lebanese army and Arab fighters. It included a photo gallery of the camp, flattened to the ground as if hit by a major earthquake and massive hurricane all at once. IRIN News said that UNRWA's international appeal to assist the refugees, fell largely on deaf ears. What a shame.

What have these poor refugees - betrayed at every turn for many, many years - done to endure such a fate? All of those frantic moms, and dads, hauling their kids in beat up trucks or by foot and moving from one place to another, seeking help and receiving little, or none at all. Indeed, there are many vital questions that should be asked of those whose decisions affect the lives of the refugees, but also there is much work to be done to help them survive the harshness of their life. For Susan and I, running one marathon to raise money to build

one playground is our main focus, and we are adamant to meet our goal.

I am also certain that there are many who care just enough to build one more playground for the children in the refugee camps. My hope is that your involvement will exceed that of making a one-time financial contribution to sponsor our run, but will rather get involved yourself as a runner, or in any other way to support such important organizations as Playgrounds for Palestine: they provide hope in a time when only misery and despair seem to eclipse the lives of so many children in Gaza, in Lebanon and in those caught behind Israeli walls in the West Bank.

Please contribute to our marathon fundraiser now, and also get involved.

Click Here to Help: <http://www.playgroundsforpalestine.org/homepage.php>

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