PEACE ACTIVIST KATHY KELLY DISCUSSES THE ATROCITIES OF WAR WITH RU STUDENTS

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Some people aren't able to pay their taxes; others simply choose not to because they feel their hard earned money is being used for useless or destructive purposes.

International peace activist Kathy Kelly refuses to pay taxes and for this she has been jailed several times.

"I refuse paying taxes because I know the money will fund wars and create destructive weapons," Kelly said.

She has dedicated her whole life to helping others, especially the civilians affected in the war-torn areas of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kelly first took interest in these people after becoming her father’s full-time caregiver. She remembers him lying in bed very sick, yet he was more concerned for the children growing up in war zones. “It’s not right,” she remembers him saying.

Since her father’s passing, Kelly has regularly visited Afghanistan and Iraq to try to help the victims of war. She co-founded an organization called Voices for Creative Nonviolence in an effort to challenge the United States military’s presence in the Middle East. For her peace-making efforts, she has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times.

She came to Radford last Tuesday to share some of her experiences in the two countries and to show students that a majority of the Afghan and Iraqi people want peace as much as Americans.

Kelly witnessed some very hard conditions in her visits to the Middle East. She explained that many people are homeless due to constant air strikes by the U.S. military. In fact, it’s estimated that there are about 400 new Afghan refugees every day.

One Afghan man shed tears while he spoke to Kelly.

“I think I’m losing my mind,” he said. “I can’t provide for my family.

Due to the homelessness many people die in the winter months. In January of 2012, 100 Afghans froze to death.

In an effort to prevent more deaths, Kelly taught the women to sew. As a result, 2,000 blankets were distributed to Afghan citizens for free.

Airstrikes aren’t the only problem. Several civilians have been killed by U.S. soldiers in cases of mistaken identity. In one instance, three cars carrying Afghan civilians were traveling into the mountains to
collect fuel. The cars came very close to American paratroopers. They were ordered to fire upon the convoy.

The first car was blown up, instantly killing everyone inside. The women in the second car evacuated and raised their hands shouting out that they were civilians, but they were still killed. Luckily U.S. soldiers finally discovered that the people were civilians and the final car was spared.

In another instance, two boys were killed after U.S. forces spotted Taliban soldiers entering the boys’ home. It was assumed since the Taliban entered that everyone inside was a terrorist.

As if these atrocities aren’t bad enough, Kelly shared that the war is also negatively affecting Americans as well. Many come home with severe post dramatic stress disorders. It’s estimated that 22 veterans commit suicide every day.

Kelly believes that these people are dying in vain and that the U.S. government is to blame. The U.S. claims that its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are to help free the people from oppression.

Kelly doesn’t buy it.

“There is no such thing as a humanitarian war,” she said.

She believes the U.S. is only present to take control of the Hindu-Kush mountain’s mineral resources and fossil fuels.

“If the U.S. builds roadways and a pipeline it will take control of the rare earth minerals and therefore will control gas and oil prices,” she said.

But is it really worth it? Is lowering the price of gas worth the lives of innocent civilians and American soldiers?

In Afghanistan, one out of every four children dies before the age of five. That is unacceptable and something needs to be done.

Kelly truly believes that peace can be reached with the Middle East it just requires effort from the citizens.

“We can tackle these problems together, but we have stand-up first,” she said.

You can find out more about Kelly's work and Voices for Creative Nonviolence at vcnv.org