



A discordant note

THE band would have sounded great but for the fact that there was one trumpet badly out of tune with the other instruments. As the music played on, I could not help wince as the rogue trumpet continued to distract me with its harsh jarring presence. It became for me a metaphor of life in Kuwait. Consider the following events.

Ten thousand Sri Lankans forced to abandon their carefully planned National Day celebrations. Delayed again. A British citizen waiting to hear a verdict in a court case more than three years old, has had his hearing delayed again for the umpteenth time after the relevant papers were not available. Unable to leave Kuwait, he has been separated from his family for all this time. There are citizens of Ghana languishing in jails for months because they have no diplomatic representation. They cannot afford lawyers. They are stuck in limbo.

Those who are financially destitute and in debt are sent to jail - how does that help amend the situation?

Members of the Filipino community are appealing for justice after a Filipina maid was sentenced to death in a murder case in which critical evidence suggests that she is innocent.

Someone in authority told me of his frustration that prisoners waiting to be deported, have to wait months because someone, somewhere can't be bothered to process the relatively straight forward paperwork. He was disturbed by the lack of justice he witnessed at work.

A decent, hardworking Kuwaiti man was fired from a national financial institution because he refused to collude with dubious banking practices.

A Western doctor who labours diligently for 60+ hours a week has not been paid again. She looks exhausted. No wonder ! This Ethiopian maid has not had a day off in two years of working long hours for a local family. With no rights and no recourse to labour law, she suffers in silence. This week at least five maids committed suicide or were fatally injured in trying to escape from their sponsors.

These are real stories. Their broken lives point to an apparent lack of justice. Kuwait is a country which I have come to appreciate and I meet so many wonderful, kind and compassionate people. Yet the lack of justice strikes a discordant note which jars the soul.

Justice is an important theme in both Islam and Christianity. Scripture is full of reminders that God is righteous and just. In other words God always does the right thing — all the time. He is always merciful and compassionate. The divine law was given in order to establish a society who would love God and love their neighbour. It is significant to me that in human history, the Middle East is the region where laws of justice and fairness were hammered out. The Arabian Peninsula witnessed the formation of the ancient Hammurabi's legal codex (Iraq), the Mosaic ten commandments and Islamic Sharia' law. If any region in the world should be known for justice, we need look no further than the Middle East. So where has it gone wrong?

Perhaps we have simply stopped caring. People can't be bothered anymore.

It was the prophet Isaiah who said "Learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the fatherless and plead the case of the widow". In other words, don't stop caring, be bothered. I pray that one day this discordant note will fade away as people start to care and make beautiful music in the land of Kuwait.

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