

Belal Farhat: Advocate for Human Rights and Social Justice

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Born as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, later acquiring Tunisian citizenship in 2011, Bilal Farhat's life has been a testament to resilience and a commitment to human rights. Raised amidst systemic deprivation, including restrictions on basic rights such as employment, Bilal's early experiences were shaped by adversity. His perspective and purpose transformed profoundly during his nine-year tenure with the Lebanese Red Cross, where he served as Coordinator of the Southern District and later led the National Training

Committee. In this role, he oversaw the development and implementation of training policies for over 10,000 volunteers across the organization.

Parallel to his humanitarian work, Bilal dedicated himself to activism, championing the rights of refugees and marginalized communities. He was a staunch advocate for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, migrant domestic workers, and sex workers who faced systemic exploitation. Alongside his family, Bilal co-founded a meal center that provided food to over 1,000 families twice weekly and daily during Ramadan in refugee camps such as Shatila and Ain el Helweh, as well as his hometown, Wadi el Zeineh.

Relocating to Tunisia marked a new chapter in Bilal's advocacy journey. As the Human Rights Program Coordinator at Al Bawsala, a leading human rights organization, Bilal worked to amplify the voices of marginalized minorities during Tunisia's democratic transition. His efforts focused on advancing free speech, the right to assembly, and citizen-centered political engagement. Bilal spearheaded advocacy campaigns, represented Al Bawsala in international human rights coalitions, and coordinated the La Rojou Initiative with partners such as Avocats Sans Frontières and the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights. This initiative critically evaluated the government's progress in implementing transitional justice recommendations by the Dignity and Truth Commission.

Bilal's contributions extended to creating Tunisia's antifascist movement, uniting activists and civil society organizations to counter the rising racism and violence against sub-Saharan migrants and asylum seekers. His unwavering commitment to human rights and justice is evident in his leadership at the national and international levels.

Despite his formal training in mechanical engineering, Bilal redirected his career to focus entirely on activism and advocacy. His life story is a powerful testament to the transformative impact of grassroots efforts and the unyielding pursuit of human rights. Bilal's work continues to inspire, underscoring the importance of amplifying the voices of the marginalized and striving for a just and equitable society.

On September 23, 2024, Bilal, deeply rooted in his hometown of Wadi el Zeineh, took the courageous step of launching a grassroots initiative to respond to the devastating displacement crisis caused by escalating Israeli aggression in Lebanon. His unwavering commitment rallied the community, transforming shared grief into collective action to support families fleeing southern Lebanon.

Over the past 40 days, Bilal and his fellow lifelong neighbors and friends have united to create safe, dignified spaces for those displaced. Through their tireless efforts, they have provided shelter, food, medical care, educational resources, and emotional support, demonstrating the resilience and compassion of a community determined to bring hope and healing to those in need.

