

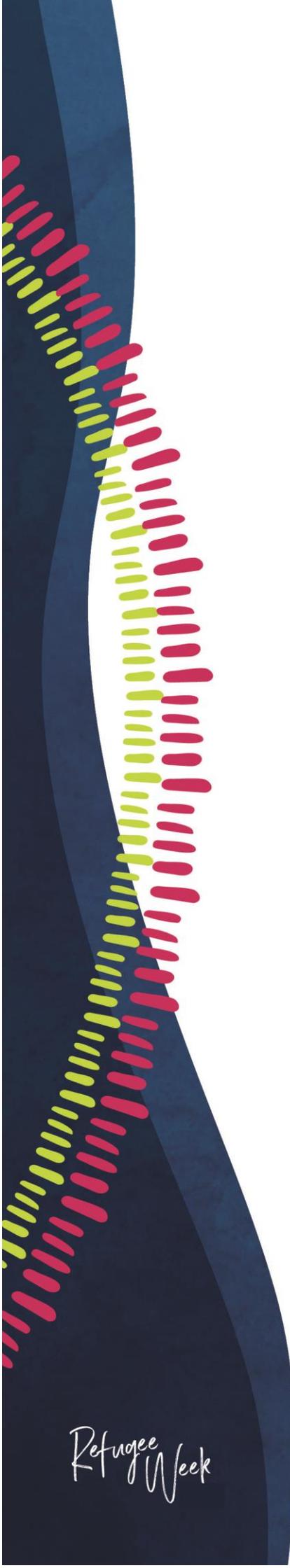
Tears of Lament – A Reflection

By Captain Sandra Pawar

One of the first steps we can take as a justice seeker is to lament alongside and with those who have been damaged and who have lost hope. Emmanuel Katongole, author of *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*, writes of lament as “a cry directed to God. It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world’s deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are”.

When I spent time in Athens with refugees for my master’s field work, there was a continuous engagement with pain as I heard devastating stories from refugees and asylum seekers. I listened to the story of a mother from Afghanistan whose six children were smuggled to Athens by human traffickers after her husband was killed by the Taliban. I sat in Omonia and Victoria Squares and watched young boys selling themselves for sex in order to survive; I listened as they said “no” but went with their exploiter anyway. I listened to case workers share how they had children as young as nine years old sleeping on the steps outside their building because they had no beds for them inside. I heard the story of a child, a baby as young as three, being left without family when her parents died at sea. These are true stories; these are real-life situations that should tear us up inside, stories that should cause us to weep.

The only thing I could do with the stories I heard and the things I saw was to give them back to God and to cry and weep in lament for these children of God who had faced and were facing things I could not even imagine. Author Bethany Hoang in her book *‘The Justice Calling’* reminds us that “there are countless stories of people all over our world—people created by God for a life of wholeness and flourishing but who instead undergo a living nightmare of injustice”. Such were the people I met in Athens: deeply broken and hurting people, scarred from the injustices of this world. Emmanuel Katongole offers that “when we draw near to those who are most sinned against, our call is not first to ‘make a difference’ but to allow the pain of that encounter to disturb us”. So, as justice seekers what we must do first is allow ourselves to be disturbed and broken by the despair we see around us.



When it comes to refugees, there is much to be broken hearted about, countless and countless stories of suffering and grief and profound loss. For many of us, we switch into activist mode, and begin to think of the many ways we can 'help' or offer aid to them, but this must not be our first response. We must first learn the language of lament before rushing to try to find solutions for the problems we see. Lament opens the way for us to name the brokenness, to honestly sit and mourn with those who mourn and weep with those who weep. It is an ongoing action that helps us stay close to the heart of God even as we move into the work of justice. It's easy to run away from people who are suffering and much harder to stand in the struggles with them; but before we attempt to do anything else, stand we must. We must stand alongside those who are suffering, we must hear and embrace their cries, and we must spend time in lament.

Who are the people in your community that break your heart and disturb you? How can you station yourself alongside them and share their pain and heartache? How can you spend time in lament for them?

Refugee
Week

