

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

On a trip home, seeing Guatemala's grit and grandeur

39



This photo taken on February 13, 2017 shows a Chinese couple posing for photographs with a rooster lantern display in Ningbo, east China's Zhejiang province. — AFP

Free hairdos to boost confidence of displaced Iraqi women



A displaced Iraqi woman who fled the violence in the northern city of Mosul has her hair cut by Chenoor, a hairdresser from Arbil who offers beauty treatments to women living in camps for displaced people. — AFP photos

Twice a month, beautician Chnoor Khezri takes her equipment to a camp near Mosul and gives displaced Iraqi women who have lost everything a proper pampering and some fresh confidence. In a small room inside the camp, the young Iranian Kurd takes out her brushes and scissors and puts blue wax to heat up in a pot. "It's not much but I work miracles with this," she says. More than 3,600 women have endured freezing temperatures and the most rudimentary comfort levels in this camp's tents since they fled the fighting between Iraqi forces and the Islamic State group in Mosul.

Some of them arrived days earlier, others have been there months but nearly all had to leave almost everything behind them. They were initially reluctant to follow a stranger in the sprawling camp and be separated from their husbands but a dozen of them eventually gave in to Khezri's efforts to bring them into her improvised beauty salon. "I offer them a haircut, eyebrow and upper lip threading. They don't ask for anything specific really. They just want me to pamper them," said Khezri, a 31-year-old Iranian Kurd who runs a beauty parlor in Arbil, the nearby capital of Iraq's Kurdish region.

One of her "clients" that day is Mervet, a 30-year-old mother who watches attentively as Khezri's fingers knead the wax, apply it on the wincing face of another young lady and peel it off sharply. "In Mosul, before the Islamic State, I used to work in a beauty salon. I find it moving to see this routine again," she says. Azhar, 34, arrived to the Hasansham camp just days ago, after risking her life to flee the IS-held west bank of Mosul, cross the Tigris River and escape through the liberated eastern side of the city. "For weeks now people have been lacking everything and prices have gone through the roof. The only thing you can find there now is potatoes, wheat and lentils," she said.

No place for women

Recounting her experiences in Mosul put her in a state of rage but a look in the mirror put a smile back on her face. "I never thought a haircut would make me so happy," she said. The word got out somehow and now a queue of women giggling at the thought of removing their hijab and getting a haircut has formed outside her temporary salon. "There is no space for women in this camp. There are plenty of hair dressers for men. There are games for the children, but nothing for us," said one of them, 23-year-old mother of two Ghada.

"Our faces are burnt by the sun, we need creams, and basic hygiene kits. We don't even have bras," said Safa, another women standing next to her. Khezri vindicated them: "There is no shame in wanting to recover your femininity. Especially in such rough living conditions, your well-being and your dignity are at stake." Ghada, who settled in the displacement camp six weeks earlier, came "to have a look" at the salon but she does not dare take a seat. "Since we got here, I've been suffering from anxiety attacks. I have nightmares. I see Daesh spies everywhere," she says, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.



"I think I need to talk to someone... a psychologist," she whispers with an embarrassed grin. Those who fled Mosul may have lived next to IS supporters or have relatives living in jihadist-controlled areas and often still feel the fear that pervaded their lives under the "caliphate". As the sun sets on Hasansham, Khezri finally packs up her beauty tools after seven hours of non-stop work, exhausted but happy. "Look at their faces, how they have transformed. They came here suspicious and all tightened up. They leave this place relaxed and proud for having made a moment for nobody else but themselves," she says. — AFP

