

# Rebel urges Muslims to wage a jihad of peace

Shand, Adam. [The Australian](#) [Canberra, A.C.T] 20 Sep 2012: 6.

ZAKY Mallah, the first Australian jailed under anti-terror laws, has "a new jihad" and a message for fellow Australian Muslims engaged in violent protests, as occurred in Sydney last weekend.

Go to Syria where your brothers are dying for freedom, democracy and the true Islamic way, rights guaranteed in this lucky country, he says.

"Spend a couple of weeks on the frontline, as I did, where members of the Free Syrian Army are dying for the very rights and freedoms we enjoy in this country. I guarantee you will come back with a different perspective, you will see Australia for what it is," he told [The Australian](#).

Mr Mallah said Australia was the perfect model for the modern Arab world that was emerging through revolution. "They want peace, freedom, democracy and they want Islam, too," he said.

Mr Mallah, the first Australian to be charged under anti-terror laws, sold his car so he could travel to the border of Turkey and Syria last month to see the civil war for himself.

He had planned to visit refugee camps in Turkey to make videos for his YouTube channel, but ended up crossing the border with members of the Free Syrian Army battling forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

Mr Mallah, who once vowed he would become a suicide bomber, says that disaffected Muslim youth in Australia should realise that jihad is not just armed struggle but resistance to false doctrine and violence.

At 29, Mr Mallah says he is a different man to the 20-year-old who made a jihad-style video after being refused a passport to travel to Lebanon. He told a police officer he wanted to kill Foreign Affairs officials and ASIO officers and then commit suicide. He served two years in jail for making the threats, but was acquitted of planning a terrorist act in 2005.

Mr Mallah says he has "a new jihad" after his Syrian experience where he filmed rebel fighters in combat. The Free Syrian Army gave him an AK-47 rifle and a bullet-proof vest. But he refused to take up arms, beyond

posing for a photograph, saying he would be breaching Australian law if he engaged in armed combat overseas.

He saw in Syria that telling the story of the struggle for freedom at great personal risk was also jihad.

It was helping people with water, feeding the poor, filling a car with petrol for fighters, helping a 70-year-old man who couldn't walk. Jihad was a struggle against one's own desires towards violence or immoral behaviour.

He had witnessed the death of his guide from the Free Syrian Army, 22-year-old Mohammed Zakoor, who was shot on a balcony in Aleppo. "A sniper spotted us and Mohammed copped a bullet to his left side just below his heart and half an hour later he was pronounced dead," says Mr Mallah. "I told the other boys that I wished it was me who got shot, because it was because of me wanting to film that Mohammed was killed."

The rebels told Mr Mallah that Mr Zakoor's death wasn't his fault.

"`This is in God's hands, it was His bullet,' they said.

"They said, `Congratulations to him, we now have another martyr.' That was their approach to someone being shot but, as an Australian, I was in tears that I had lost someone," he says. At that moment Mr Mallah realised how misguided his anger towards Australian society had been.

"Syrian Muslims can't even practice their religion properly. They can't grow their beards. My beard wasn't even long and I was told that I should take it off or at least trim it down.

"They can't go to the mosque more than twice a day or the government militia sees them as radicalised. Even going to morning prayers is being seen as radicalised," he says.

Mr Mallah showed the rebels images of Sydney on the internet.

"They said, `You are so lucky to be in Australia'.

"We do have religious freedom here in Australia, there's no doubt about that. Anyone who disrespects freedom doesn't deserve to live in a country where there is freedom.

"This hit me in the head while in Syria. We Muslims have so much freedom here yet we are causing so much trouble."

But his experience had showed hate and violence were self-defeating. "The more you fight, the more you lose. The more you have this hatred, this anger, the more you feel victimised, the less people listen to you. People will look down on you as always being angry, frustrated. No one wants to listen to you because they get scared of you," Mr Mallah said.

Life became easier when he learned to appreciate his struggles rather than responding with rage and violence.

"We live in a very comfortable, secure environment. In Syria, you see a helicopter and you run for cover.

"It's just a terrifying situation every minute. You don't know what day it is, you don't know what time it is. All you know is that you have to survive and you have to run."

Mr Mallah understands the anger that the film *Innocence of Muslims* has provoked around the world, but said violence was "un-Islamic and un-Australian".

He suggests that if Muslims want to protest the video "they should go to the city, tape their mouths up and hold signs saying that we will not retaliate . . . Then Australia will take young Muslim men more seriously."

Credit: ADAM SHAND

Word count: **912**

(c) News Limited Australia. All rights reserved.