

Dhaka - The last day. Today, December, 16th, is Bangladesh Independence Day (1971), National Day, intensively celebrated all over the country – there are National Flags raised everywhere in a patriotism demonstration. For us is an important day specially because it is the last day here and we have a lot of things to do yet.

Along the morning, we stayed in the Guest House finishing some pending tasks (*ex: to receive 110 pillows to the houses only delivered today*).

Around 3 PM we – Vitor, Maria and Sofia - decided to go have lunch in a Chinese restaurant.

In the middle of the meal we noticed that other costumers at the table beside us were frequently glancing at us. And they made us a sign, inviting us to join them. And there we go. It was a birthday party of one of the gentlemen, Aimon,... who was accompanied by his wife and three friends. We all sang the 'Happy Birthday to You', there was a terrific cake having a "Merry Christmas" written on it

:) Shared the cake with us... and when we prepared to turn back to our table our hosts were asking for more food and drinks for us three (*after the cake...*). Definitely we had moved and were part of the birthday party now.

And we talked and ate with that so sympathetic group, realizing that they live near the Dhaka Project premises (*and they promised to visit it tomorrow*). The lady, in a friendly gesture, offered Maria and Sofia part of her bracelets (kind of "slave bracelets").

A few pictures have been taken, phone numbers have been exchanged... we have made new friends! At the end they firmly insisted on paying our lunch! And on the last day of our stay we are still feeling surprised by Bangladeshi people way of welcoming and the simplicity of their gestures. They look at us as persons, regardless of skin colour, clothes, language, etc.

Then we have gone shopping... either Sofia or Vitor wanted to take some collectibles to their homes. Fairoz, an economy teacher in one of the best schools of Bangladesh, joined us. He is cooperating with Maria on opening a new school that is going to introduce the "International Curriculum". Fairoz gives support on teachers' recruitment, and on program and timetables definition etc, being a future responsible for the school after its reopening on January 15th, 2008.

However, the shopping had to be very fast, Maria still had an important mission for us: visiting a slum situated in the middle of the best zone in Dhaka and only accessed by boat. Visiting a slum, alone, carrying the shopping bags and in a no moon night!

It's not surprising to see the fear in Sofia, spite of the curiosity of all in knowing that quarter to see how some help could be given later.

We contracted a boat man and sailed in a perilous junk through a lake, in absolute darkness towards the island. As we approached we were received by a committee who accompanied us during our visit to several houses, trying to know if they have drinkable water (*they have*), if the children attend school (*they don't*), knowing about trading, etc.

The same friendly reception we had been honoured with in the restaurant... once again, we had it here in this forgotten quarter, placed among the most luxurious Dhaka quarters. We have been honoured with a visit to the water system... not existing water flow. There are 3 wells, 2 to provide washing and 1 with drinkable water through filters. Water come from the lake...





We also visited some houses with battery powered TVs, (*there is no electricity*) as well as bathrooms and a common kitchen.

We didn't feel unsafe there, the women welcoming us, the children asking us to take pictures... The men were watching TV... probably a Cricket or Football game... it seems to be an universal law :)

Sofia felt so confident that she didn't mind staying alone, all of us were each one at each corner talking with people.

We bought some powder cakes that Maria and Feroz risked to taste. Sofia and Vítor, having a long

course flight waiting for them, thought it would be better to decline the offer.

We returned tranquilly being sure that there is a lot to do in this quarter but also in this country, deserving our help, for the human wealth of this people, spite of their huge material poverty.

We are going to leave the country, Maria, the children, The Dhaka Project and all the team in a few hours, and we are already missing them, we haven't realized yet that in some hours we are again in our occidental comfort, with flowing water, with our costumes not existent in this corner of the world. Will we be able to forget this experience? Has it just been an adventure? Or as some could think, just nice holidays or still some sacrifice? Nothing true... we leave with a different vision of the world. A vision we discovered, Sofia and Vítor in our 40's (*Sofia is claiming... saying it's only 39, and Maria makes me correct it*)



An young lady in her 30's, in her simplicity, sensitivity and a strong will, has given us an unthinkable open door to the world.

She chose to leave out of her amazing world where she works as a crew member in one of the most prestigious airline company, living in one of the richest cities over the planet to spend her free time in the slums.

Ho to forget her? How to forget the smiles of all these children who implored us to return and not forget them?

We didn't realize we are leaving yet. The taxi is already waiting.

We'll never forget and let the promise for the life, Maria and The Dhaka Project children!