

Gafsa (2)

I would like to conclude this record of my trip with the benevolent people of Bayt Zakat by talking more about the project and the participating team. As I mentioned in the previous article, the Al-Othman Vocational Training Center, as well as the late Abdullah Al-Othman Mosque, consists of a training institute dedicated to agricultural development studies; helping farmers to use modern methods of agriculture, crop preservation, and pest control. Training workshops in the use of modern agricultural equipment are also included. The complex also consists of a medical clinic, a central kitchen, a 100 student dorm, and an expansion which will house a center for girls and a *katateeb*—a center to study reading, writing, and the Holy Quran.

During the inaugural ceremony, one of the specialists gave us a lecture about the olive groves and we were surprised to learn that Tunisian olives are some of the highest quality olives in the world. Our friend Ibrahim Al-Saleh, General Director of Bayt Zakat, asked: “If they’re such a high quality agricultural product, then why don’t we see the Tunisian products in the market along with the Spanish, Italian, and Moroccan ones?” The lecturer answered with grief: “We export olives around the world, but we don’t process or manufacture the products. So when it reaches the international markets, it’s labeled under different names.”

This is a result of the country's negligence of agriculture and industry, and its focus on tourism; an industry which has already been washed-up since the financial crisis, and with terrorism wracking its joints. With this, the Tunisian people are returning to their roots. According to our friend, all the olive trees we saw from Kairouan to Gafsa are no more than eight years old and before that the land was barren. This