

Gafsa (1)

The city of Gafsa is located 350 km away from Tunis and its inhabitants depend on mining and agriculture for their livelihoods. From the city of Kairouan until the borders of Gafsa, you can see the groves of olive trees rolling out across the plains. Upon entering the city, a rocky hill is visible, behind which stretches the barren desert.

Our story with Gafsa started years ago when The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs hosted a delegation of Muslims from Switzerland. I was invited to the meeting and a project for building an Islamic museum was presented. The driving force behind the project was a man of Tunisian origin who was living in exile and had become a Swiss citizen. Our friend, Alghareeb Al-Arabi—for that really was his name—tried to convince me of his project, but I declined because I believed there were Islamic countries which were in more dire need. (The name Alghareeb Al-Arabi is unique because it literally means “the Arab stranger.”) Some time passed, and after the change of regime in Tunisia, Alghareeb visited us again and presented a housing project for the poor. I replied to him, "Alghareeb, houses benefit only those who live in them. Your whole country needs rehabilitation and sustainable development. Forget the houses for now." And after a while, he presented Bayt Zakat with a development project worth implementing. I asked him who gave him the land. He answered: "It a 30,000 square meter plot donated by a man from the Bani Zaid family." This kind man's intention for the donation was that it should be used to build a mosque, because there were no mosques around that area. His brother, may God have mercy on his soul, used to call the *adhan*—the call