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Office of Transition Initiatives – Lebanon

July 2009

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In September 2007, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) launched a three-year program to promote peace and stability in Lebanon. After an initial emphasis on cross-confessional dialogue, OTI refined the program's objectives in June 2008 to focus on providing youth with alternatives to extremism and mitigating tensions in conflict-prone areas. These objectives further U.S. Government policy goals in Lebanon by preserving democratic space and strengthening the country's fragile civil peace.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

In Lebanon, OTI partners with a wide range of civil society players in marginalized areas of the country's north, the Beqaa, and the south to engage youth in civic activism, bolster nonpartisan groups, and strengthen voices of peace in times of crisis. In closed political environments outside the capital, support to nascent youth organizations has helped empower civic-minded youth to challenge the dominance of political forces with radical agendas.

In the south, for example, a network of 80 young activists came together to form a nonpartisan nongovernmental organization (NGO) that has created a new space for collective action outside the sphere of influence of dominant political parties. In neighborhoods around the country's largest Palestinian refugee camp of Ein El Helweh, OTI has supported youth-led community improvement and conflict mitigation activities in areas plagued by violence and neglect.

In the Beqaa, OTI helped rehabilitate a large piece of land that has been turned into an apolitical space for youth-focused social, cultural, and sports events. The work included removing political graffiti and supporting an independent NGO in charge of managing the park. In conflict-prone, poverty-stricken northern areas, OTI helped at-risk youth acquire life-changing skills through vocational training combined with civic education. As part of these efforts, more than 35 youths trained by an OTI partner in Akkar are now employed or interning with local businesses.

At the national level, a roaming cinema toured all of the country's districts to screen films dealing with conflict and host public debates around the theme of nonviolence. OTI also supported a series of Hyde Park-style debates on Lebanon's leading television channel, providing youth with a rare opportunity to interact with elected officials live on the set.

FAST FACTS

Start Date: September 2007
Budget: FY09: \$6.5 million in TI funds
Partner: Chemonics International, Inc.
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