SNAPSHOT

Providing Support to Families of Libya's Missing

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor are equipping Families of Libya's missing persons with the tools they need to find answers.

USAID/Libya

General National Congress President Mohammed Magerief visits the Mafqood Support Center to express support for its efforts and to commit to supporting families of the missing, both financially and psychologically.

"It is more than just an IT center. It is a place where families who fought on opposite sides of the war have learned to sit in the same room, and sometimes listen to each other's stories"

*-- Mervat Mhani
Manager, Mafqood
Center Project*

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January 2013 – General National Congress President Mohammed Magarief attended the opening of the Mafqood Center for Missing Persons on December 17, 2012, and provided a DNA sample in support of the search for his brother, Azzat, who has been missing since the 1990s. His is by no means a unique case. Thousands of families are still searching for answers, with "up to 10,000 people missing… from Libya's recent conflict" and decades of oppression, as explained in the November 2012 issue of The Economist.

In order to bring healing and reconciliation to affected families, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) are equipping Libyans with the tools they need to find answers. Such circumstances provide an opportunity to bring Libyans together around a common cause and facilitate reconciliation around tangible results and collaborative efforts.

The 2011 civil war has drawn this issue into particular focus as it has proven to be a significant roadblock on the path to a successful transition. During the uprising, persons from both sides went missing, often killed or arrested, and are survived by families who know little to nothing about their whereabouts. Many families are frustrated with the government's lack of progress in resolving their cases, and while some have registered their missing with the Ministry of Martyrs and Missing, many remain in the dark.

On October 21, 2012, USAID provided a grant to the Mafqood Center to equip and establish a computer room where families from all sides of the conflict will receive training on advocacy using social networking and online media. The Center aims to create not only a sanctuary for families to seek solace and comfort, but also a platform from which the families can form a unified voice to tackle the legal and social issues they face.

Meanwhile, State/DRL is providing assistance to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in its efforts to locate, recover, and identify missing persons. This project employs advanced forensic techniques, partnerships with Libyan civil society, and an online registry to help authorities identify missing persons and notify families looking for closure.

These complementary efforts foster national reconciliation by allowing families from all sides to find answers and ultimately healing. At the December 17 meeting, two women, whose relatives fought on opposite sides during the war, were present. They had gone from being unable to speak to each other to learning to empathize with one another's struggle and ultimately find a commonality between them, thanks to the common tools provided.

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