Meditating Tripoli’s feuds a step at a time

Project looks to gear residents of northern city toward peaceful conflict resolution

By Mazin Sidahmed

The Daily Star

BEIRUT – "We’ve said everything we want to say. So at the end here I want to ask you what you’ve learn about mediation today?" Marwa Moulik, to ask you what you’ve learned about mediation today?" Marwa Moulik, standing in a small classroom at the Women’s Academy in the Qobbeh neighborhood.

"A line of communication between two disputing sides," one of the roughly two-dozen women packed into the room said.

"It pushes people away from violence, to find a solution that’s peaceful," said Fatima al-Omar, another attendee.

This is all part of an awareness session for a new project that hopes to get people in Tripoli toward resolving their disputes through mediation.

"This project is building the culture of mediation," Samar Boulos, of the Safadi Foundation, said, "building it as a tool for conflict resolution.

That’s why we are raising awareness for people to solve their problems through mediation, because mediation is a win-win approach in a peaceful way."

The program – funded by the European Union, Mercy Corp and the American University – is titled "Building Community Capacity for Dispute Resolution and Reconciliation" in Lebanon." The program provides different neighborhoods in Tripoli with young mediators that are trained in the art of mediation. Of the roughly two-dozen women packed into the room.

"We all know that Tripoli, for a long time, has had a lot of neighborhood disputes," Boulos said. "Without considering if you want, the roots of the problems, it is local discrepancies between people." "We’re not saying that with this project we’re going to solve all the problems. Of course … but we want to advance a new understanding to solve disputes."

Bassel al-Esber, one of the 30 mediators and now based in Qobbeh, is hopeful about the effects that mediation can have on Tripoli. He admits that originally he was highly skeptical about the idea.

"I thought people would say, ‘We’ve got a lot of problems, our money struggles, there’s no work, we’re trying to get by and you want to talk about mediation?’" he recalls.

With time, he came around to the idea and now believes that it can have a real impact on the neighborhood.

"I didn’t think that mediation would work in this neighborhood but I realized that it can and it has made a big difference," Esber added. "You saw today how much they got into it."

"We have already mediated some disputes since they started and the main goal now is spreading awareness."

The awareness session held in Qobbeh in which Aweek, and later Esber, taught local women about how mediation works is critical in ensuring that this project has the desired impact. The attendees had an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the idea.

"This project benefits us, it doesn’t hurt us," Fatima al-Omar, one of the selectees was selected due to her history with discord. "Without considering if you want, the roots of the problems, it is local discrepancies between people." "We’re not saying that with this project we’re going to solve all the problems. Of course … but we want to advance a new understanding to solve disputes."

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