THE ROADMAP TO RECONCILIATION IN TRIPOLI:

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS FOR LAUNCHING
A COMMUNAL RECONCILIATION IN TRIPOLI

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ACRONYMS

BDS	Business Development Services
CC	Communal Conversations
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
FCT	Forum for Cities in Transition
GoL	Government of Lebanon
ISF	Internal Security Forces
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoIM	Ministry of Interior and Municipalities
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MoPR	Ministry of Power and Resources
MoT	Municipality of Tripoli
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMSME	Nano, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RRT	Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli

ACKNOLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The city of Tripoli, Lebanon is considered to host some of the most impoverished areas in Lebanon and the Middle East that have been left out of any political, social, or economic developmental priorities. A fact that has kept some of the residents of these areas susceptible to any intervention and ready to take arms in return to a small pay or even a promise of a better future. Over around six years, the city has witnessed more than 20 rounds of neighborhood fights between Sunnis and Alawites mainly residing in Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. Triggered by the war in Syria and political allegiances to the different entities fighting there, the conflict intensified between 2011 and 2014 leaving behind not only a considerable number of casualties, but also a psychological scar that will take long to heal. A security plan was put in place in April 2014, putting an end to all armed conflicts and bringing the city to calm. Residents expected change to take place and for them to be part of the larger national concern towards better cities, however, promises of enhancement and development were put to no avail.

TRIPOLI

BEIRUT
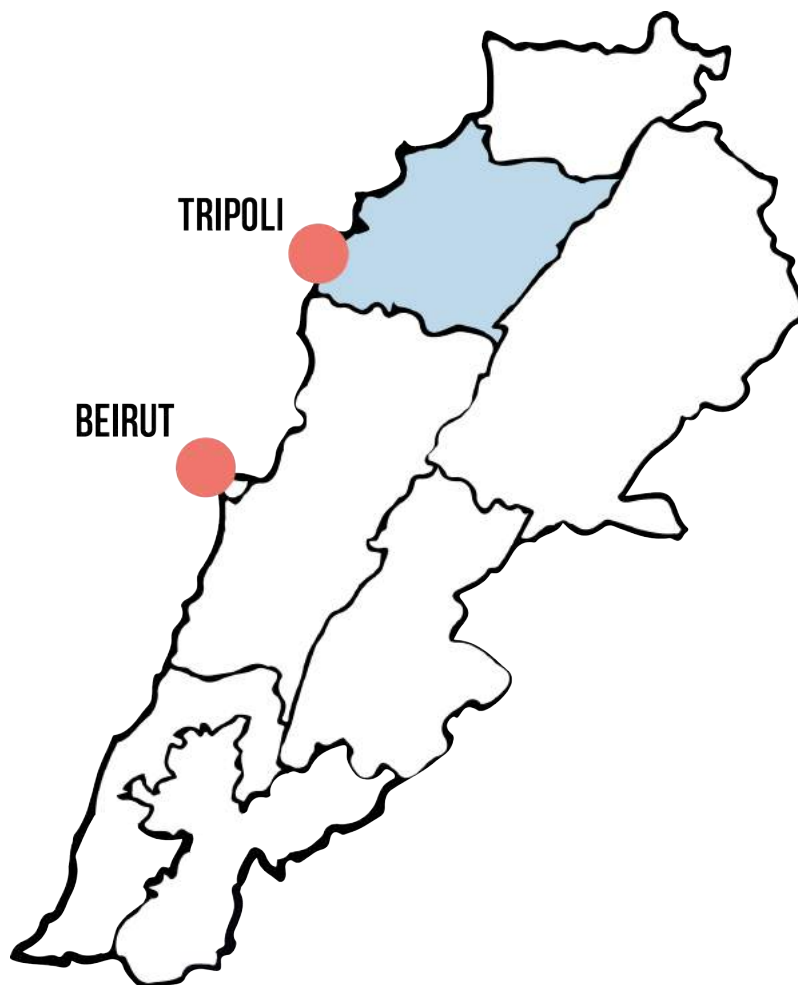
International and local peace-building experts meet in Tripoli to analyze the research data, October 2016

The "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli," (RRT) project is a grassroots initiative that aims at launching a transitional justice route through understanding the public perceptions in Tripoli about reconciliation as well as people's readiness and willingness to engage in a communal reconciliation process once launched. In order for any process to be inclusive and driven by the people, it needs to respond to their main grievances and priorities. Therefore, RRT team, led by the Forum for Cities in Transition (FCT) - Tripoli team, sought the public's opinions on reconciliation drawing on a wide range of lenses. Because reconciliation had always been a sensitive topic for discussion in the conflict ridden areas of Tripoli, one of the major goals in the initial phases of the research was to actually test the openness of different factions of the public to discuss the subject and engage in a communal dialogue.

Since its inception in mid 2015, the RRT project team met with a cross-section of the local political leaders and key stakeholders in the city from both confessions engaged in the conflict. Perhaps because what the team was proposing was so startling mainly since the word 'reconciliation' usually conjures for many a process that includes confessions of wrongdoing, to tribunals, applications for amnesty for actions abjured as criminal, amnesty for crimes, and other components that would be deemed impossible under the current circumstances; the team was met with significant reservations in some quarters at first. But these positions changed when the team explained the bottom-up approach that focuses on peacebuilding and building relationships as a prerequisite while tackling important components that are usually not covered by civil society approaches. One of these critical components is the reintegration of former fighters in the community mainly relying on the expertise of the project partners, "Fighters for Peace", who have proven successful in their approach of engaging this criteria of the community. For some of the key stakeholders, the team had to answer to their major fears and explain what true reconciliation usually involves. At that point we felt that goodwill replaced skepticism, and the team was encouraged to pursue its efforts. Nevertheless, the team kept getting some impressions such as "people do not want to remember the past because they think it will cause fighting to

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breakout again; we are not ready to face our own history", "it's calm now and there are no clashes, isn't it risky to open the subject again and maybe re-traumatize people?"

During September and October 2016, the FCT - Tripoli delegation and the RRT project team relied on the peacebuilding experts aboard in coordination with numerous gatekeepers from the conflict zones, to facilitate twenty nine communal conversations as well as thirteen key informant interviews (KIIs). These sessions engaged more than 300 individuals from the conflict zones in discussions pertaining to their main grievances and aspirations while introducing, whenever feasible, questions about how they perceive reconciliation and whether they are willing to engage in such a process whenever it is launched. The team adopted this approach because it believes that any reconciliation process that aspires to reach a successful end must be built from the bottom up, and not be top down; it must be people-driven and not in the clutches of bureaucratic pandering.

Later in October, the team engaged in two experts' meetings one engaging five international experts on reconciliation and peacebuilding in Tripoli while the other meeting took place in Stolat, Bulgaria engaging more than seventy participants from fifteen divided cities from various countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa. These meetings were a major contribution from the Forum for Cities in Transition to the FCT Tripoli delegation as part of the commitment towards helping Tripoli in its road to reconciliation. The consultations helped in the planning for the last step of the research which included the feedback sessions to the participants from the previous communal conversations especially the part related to practical interventions for long-term public engagement in the reconciliation process.

This report presents a summary of the findings of the research including the communal conversations, key informant interviews, the two experts' meetings, as well as the feedback sessions. It also analyzes some of the key entry points on short, medium, and long term to be the "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli".

Forum for Cities in Transition in its 7th edition focused on discussing "The Roadmap To Reconciliation in Tripoli"

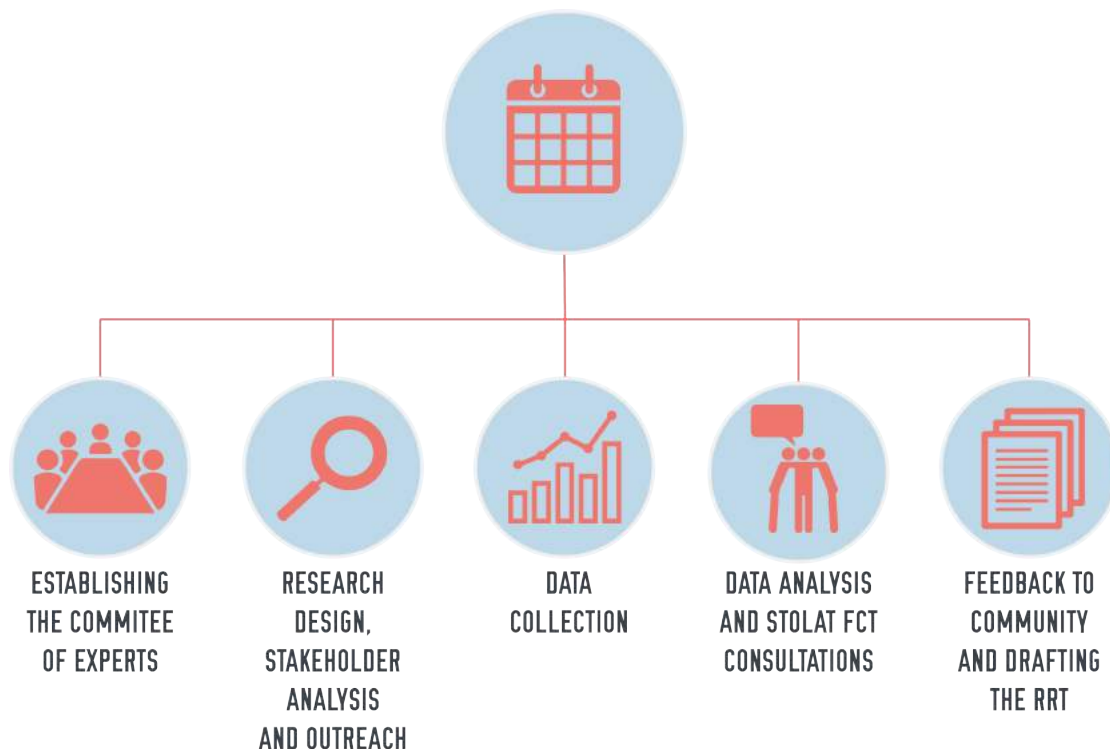*October 16-21, 2016 in Stolat, Bulgaria*

METHODOLOGY

The project **established a team** of reconciliation experts and peacebuilders, both local and national, technically supported by international experts from the FCT, to design and guide the community engagement process through:

➢ Engaging samples of various community groups in **communal conversations and interviews**
➢ Listening, Understanding, and Shedding the light on the **root causes** of the socio-economic, socio-political, legal, and security issues in Tripoli and analyze how they affect the prospects of reconciliation
➢ Put forward a transitional justice process for the progress of the **"Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli"**

The research was based on the following principles:

➢ **Transparency** with the community about the aim of the research, the data collected, and the purpose
➢ **Confidentiality** to protect individuals, ensure comfort, and encourage openness
➢ **Respect** towards community members, their experiences, grievances, and grudges

To achieve these objectives, the team worked through five phases over a period of nine months from July 2016 to March 2017.

| ESTABLISHING THE COMMITEE OF EXPERTS | RESEARCH DESIGN, STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND OUTREACH | DATA COLLECTION | DATA ANALYSIS AND STOLAT FCT CONSULTATIONS | FEEDBACK TO COMMUNITY AND DRAFTING THE RRT |

PHASES

ACTIVITIES

ESTABLISHING THE COMMITEE OF EXPERTS

- This phase was led by Bilal Al Ayoubi and Dr. Nabil Chinder and included engaging the national Peacebuilding experts Fadi Abi Allam: Permanent Peace Movement, Assaad Chaftari: Fighters For Peace, and Jean Paul Chami: Peace Labs to establish the Committee of Experts

- They designed an action plan and task details of the committee including the overall strategy of the process and how the research will guide it depending on the findings and the public perceptions.
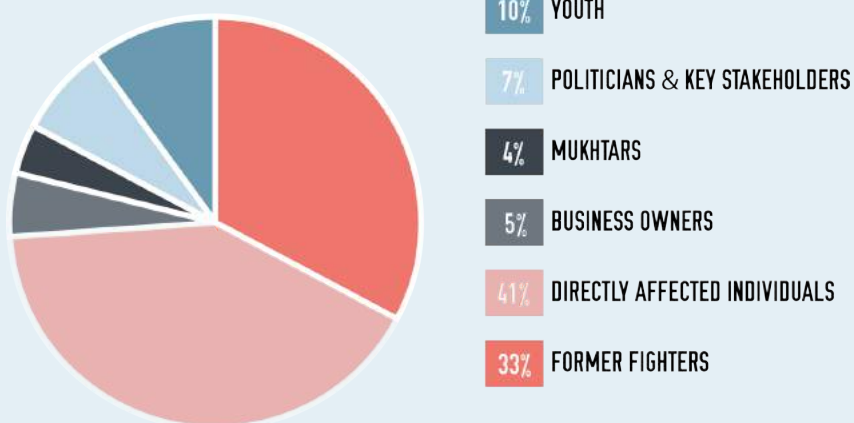
RESEARCH DESIGN, STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND OUTREACH

- Deciding on the main questions and direction that the communal conversations and key informant interviews should take.

- Identified a detailed list of sample stakeholders covering the following communal categories: Women, Youth, Business owners, Former Fighters, Victims and directly affected communities. These stakeholders were from Jabal Mohsen, Bab al Tabbaneh, Qobbe, and Mankoubeen neighborhoods.
Explained the project to them through gatekeepers from the areas which made the outreach possible especially to directly affected communities and former fighters.

DATA COLLECTION

O Conducted 29 CCs in the areas previously known as conflict zones with the stakeholders identified in phase II.

O CCs focused on getting information about the following:
- How the conflict is perceived by the participants (Regional/Sectarian/Ideological/Social/etc.)
- What the participants believe are the main reasons for the conflict as well as its major consequences
- The level of awareness of participants about reconciliation, its prospects, and their likelihood to engage in a long term process including what they are ready and willing to offer for that process.
- What are the major demands of participants to engage in reconciliation

O Conducted 13 KIIs in the neighborhoods including: Mokhtars (former or current), Political figures, Community Mobilizers, and other relevant key stakeholders. We should also add that we have met a total of 300 divided as follow:

70%   30%

- 10% YOUTH
- 7% POLITICIANS & KEY STAKEHOLDERS
- 4% MUKHTARS
- 5% BUSINESS OWNERS
- 41% DIRECTLY AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS
- 33% FORMER FIGHTERS
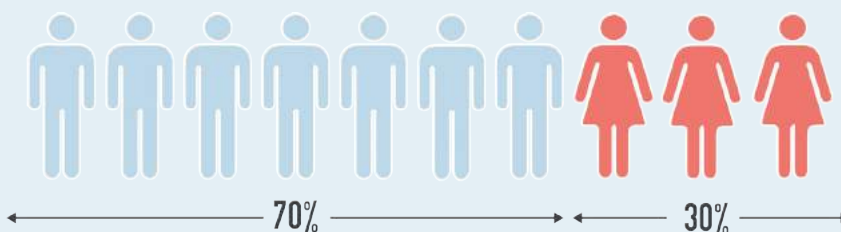
DATA ANALYSIS AND STOLAT FCT CONSULTATIONS

○ Data collected during phase III was analyzed and discussed with five international experts in peacebuilding and reconciliation from the FCT. Data was divided into two strata:

> a) Information that would yield general recommendations and
> b) Information that would yield information specific to conflict areas, and thus, could enable the team to make specific recommendations for implementation of which would alleviate the problems in these neighborhoods and, as a result increase the potential for a more substantial buy-in on their part.

○ In breaking down our analysis the team wanted to distinguish recommendations that ought to be implemented by an established institution or government agency but over which it had limited or no control, and recommendations that could be implemented by a volunteer corps of the Tripoli community or NGOs active in specific areas.

○ Draft report V1.0 was shared with over 70 delegates from 15 divided cities from various countries, who have experienced problems of reconciliation comparable to Tripoli's. This FCT conference took place at Stolat, Bulgaria, between the 16th and 21st of October 2016. The participating delegates and reconciliation experts gave their input and hence helped in the fine-tuning of ideas in the document especially in the design of the recommendations part.

○ The FCT delegates not only gave feedback on the RRT document and project process but also pledged, per city, to support during 2017 the FCT Tripoli delegation to achieve tangible results from the recommendations and action plan that would be set forth by the team. This support might vary in shape but it is set to mainly utilize the cities' expertise and training capacities in the development of FCT Tripoli programs.

FEEDBACK TO COMMUNITY AND DRAFTING THE RRT

○ The final stage of this project aimed at reengaging the participants who were targeted during the data collection phase, especially those who showed interest in continuing the discussions, through feedback sessions. These communal conversations allowed the audience to discuss the findings of the RRT in an attempt to inspire and encourage them to take action and ownership in the process of implementation of recommendations. This phase engaged around two thirds of the initial communal conversations participants.

○ A PowerPoint presentation depicting the major findings from Phase III including the root causes of the conflict, its consequences, suggested solutions, as well as the overall strategy or track of the RRT process. The PowerPoint presentation was preluded by a short movie produced by Elias Khlat to pave the way for the feedback discussions and aiming to gain the trust of participants that the FCT Tripoli delegation is serious in the attempt of making their voices heard. This presentation was conducted to 10 groups with an average of twenty participants per CC.

○ The key findings were also shared with 15 KIIs including political party advisors and leaders, senior former fighters and militia leaders, security key figures, business and NGO key actors.

○ Finalizing the "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli" document which is the basis of 2017 pilot programming for FCT Tripoli delegation and a guide for many local, national entities and international donors who are currently implementing or interested in programming around reconciliation in the city. This document that the team considers a "living document for an ongoing action research" is likely to have several iterations as the process develops in the future and more partners, beneficiaries, and participants would join to be part of it.

Limitations

The team was also aware of the shortcomings of its approach. The conversations were not professional Focus Groups Discussions even though the initial design aimed at that, but the participants required a different sensitized approach. They were also conducted in less than ideal circumstances, especially on the political level, in parallel to the release of the indictment related to the 2013 dual bombing of the Salam and Taqwa Mosques.

Some respondents were also influenced by the responses of others in the group because many were neighbors and this often inhibited free flowing discussions. Interviewees were selected through gatekeepers from the areas and therefore we cannot rule out bias that might have happened through the filtering those gatekeepers might have done. Some participants, especially former fighters, were constrained by the presence of local community/neighborhood leaders. All this was due to the fact that the project team had very limited resources especially when it comes to time allotted to conduct these conversations. It was guided by the belief that in this first stage of what would be an ongoing process, it is better to begin making relationships within both communities, allay their suspicions, and establish a basis for building trust.

Another major limitation was the mobility of some of the interviewees and communal conversations participants who, for security purposes, were not able to get out of their neighborhoods and preferred to conduct the meetings there. This was a diversion from the initial plan to meet them in more neutral grounds to reduce any pressure on them to talk. But having said that, the discussions proved to be open and smooth all along. In general, interviewers allowed interviewees to fully express emotional responses to questions without interruption in the belief that it was important to give them an opportunity to "get stuff off their chests" before having them settle down and give more considered responses to questions. Indeed, some of the respondents who were most agitated at the beginning of the conversation started modulating their stances as the conversation progressed while other voices were heard. In discussions among themselves on this phenomenon, the project team concluded that reconciliation had two prongs, each of which had to be approached differently. On the one hand, there are the victims, sharing their narrative of the conflict as they experienced it; on the other, victims with emotional overloads, angry and vengeful, many of whom are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other mental health ailment that had stunted their post conflict recovery and require special attention, not less than the provision of the mental health facilities that would help their recovery in many cases.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Even though the signing of the Document of National Accord in Taif, Saudi Arabia on October 22nd 1989 by the surviving members of the 1972 parliament had put an end to fifteen years of the bloody civil war in Lebanon, some annexes of that civil war story continued in the city of Tripoli for long after the agreement. The Accord, or "Taif Agreement", was not fully implemented especially in terms of the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon that was supposed to happen two years after the agreement and took almost fifteen years through which none of the sectarian groups who participated in the war had the opportunity to take seriously a process of reconciling with one another. The Accord, which resulted in a general amnesty for all the militias who participated in the war, overlooked a serious reconciliation process as the focus drifted solely on reconstruction of physical structures and spaces without catering for either the psychological scars or the communal reconciliation needs. In February 2005, the engineer and godfather of the "Taif Agreement", Prime Minister Rafiq el Hariri, was assassinated in the heart of Beirut with allegations pointing at the Syrian regime and Hizballah leading to a vertical division of the Lebanese society with both camps taking to the streets their demands. On March 8th, pro-Assad regime supporters rallied in Beirut in support of the Syrian Army and Hizballah. Few days later, on March 14th 2005, anti-Assad regime parties and crowd also rallied in Beirut and defined the division between the two camps which continue to draw the politics of the country to date. It wasn't until May 7th 2008 that this political division became violent in Beirut when Hizballah and allies occupied the streets of the city in a significant show of force which many define as a significant "scar" between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon. Sunni groups in Tripoli reacted few days after and the Alawite Jabal Mohsen, Hizballah's ally in the city, was attacked leading to few casualties and injuries among the residents. This was a first in a series of 22 rounds of clashes between the Sunni areas of Bab al Tabbaneh, Qobbe, and Beddawi from one side and the Alawite Jabal Mohsen from another.

On a national level, Lebanon continued to struggle from an ill-governed system that produces political deadlocks every few years whereby the ruling parties would not be able to elect a President of the Republic, or would abuse the law to renew the term of the Lebanese Parliament without going back to the people despite risking legitimacy, and most popular during the past recent years would be an almost paralyzed cabinet that is not only responsible for catering for around 5 million Lebanese but also an additional 1.5 million Syrian refugees who are spread all over the country. Almost a third of the Lebanese population currently consists of refugees especially when we add half a million Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon for decades.

The Syrian uprising in 2011 exacerbated the clashes in Tripoli that started on May 10th 2008 especially that it deepened the divide between the two communities over their affiliations with and against Hizballah and the

Syrian regime. It wasn't only about politics this time, but also about arms proliferation that increased during 2012 and 2013 fueled by regional players who were involved in the Syrian conflict. This led to an increase in the intensity of the clashes leaving more destruction and casualties among the two sides as well as the Lebanese Armed Forces who were the usual "referee" signaling the end of most rounds of clashes through a forceful intervention that was always defined as a "No-winner whistle".

A quick stroll down Syria Street between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al Tabbaneh would take anyone back to the days of the Lebanese 1975 civil war. The same streets had witnessed in the course of the civil war, particularly 1985, a massacre claiming the lives of hundreds of Bab Al Tabbaneh residents (sources claim a range between 700 and 2000). This massacre has since become ingrained in the collective memory, not only among the older generation, but also among the younger generation. This massacre, the team found, is used across generations as an alibi, whereby the youth were brought up listening again and again to the stories about it, as it was invariably brought up whenever the conversation turned to issues of reconciliation. "[They] will not let go of the past" someone from either sides of the conflict will claim.

On April 1st 2014, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) headed by Prime Minister Tammam Salam started implementing a security plan in Tripoli putting an end to the numerous rounds of clashes and returning normalcy to the city, Lebanon's second largest. This plan though, did not take into account a systematic process to reconcile the Alawite and Sunni communities living in the conflict zones. Neither did it make, until the day of this research early 2017, any attempts to address the city's developmental needs, especially in the mostly impoverished and underdeveloped areas known for their astonishingly high percentages of unemployment, illiteracy, and lack of basic services. The "Plan" mainly tackled the security aspect, which included a large number of detainees and "Wanted" individuals. But despite all this dysfunctionality on a higher level and the socio-economic pressure placed by the current developments including the Syrian refugee crisis, the security plan still holds in the Tripoli and the LAF continues to maintain presence in the city making sure that normalcy is sustained as long as a political umbrella is provided. The influence of these events continues to be seen today and so recently with the municipal elections during which Alawites were not represented in the elected municipal council of the city of Tripoli nor were they able to get any *Mokhtars*[1] elected, a most probable result of the lack of voting of residents in the front-line neighborhoods to any of the Alawite candidates.

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[1] Mukhtar, or the "chosen" in Arabic, is an elected representative who usually supports citizens in administrative paperwork such as granting documents required to issue identification cards (IDs) and passports in addition to providing proof checking signatures and pictures. The municipal elections of May 2016 resulted in a total loss of Alawite communities for the Mukhtar positions.

THE NARRATIVE AND KEY FINDINGS

> **"These politicians are useless (...) how can they engage in a reconciliation"**

There were no specific indicators to highlight the willingness and readiness of the participants in a reconciliation process more evident than the participants' own confirmations in few cases while most of those interviewed focused long fetched preparations needed as prerequisites while their blame on the absence of permanent peace and reconciliation was put on a wide array of reasons. Some highlighted the **absence of trust in political authorities and politicians** who for some "do not invest in rehabilitating and reconstructing our areas because they know there will be more battles to come" while another claimed that "these politicians are useless, they can't even elect a President for the Republic or a Parliament[2], how can they engage in a reconciliation." It is indeed a hindering aspect when the public shows no or little trust in the political leadership who is responsible for steering any reconciliation process or in the least providing the needed resources and enabling environment for it to happen. But that was not what the conversations highlighted to be the only missing piece when it comes to the political culture; another rather intriguing aspect which got an absolute agreement among all engaged in the discussions was the **absence of the rule of law** and the general feeling among them all of being victims.
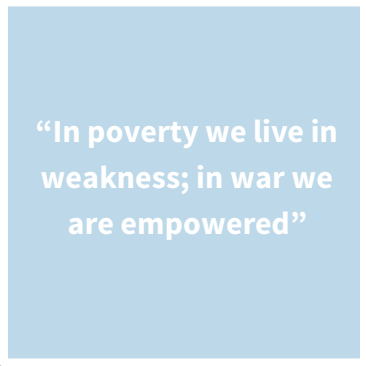

Participants describing the causes of the armed conflict

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[2] The research was conducted in Sep-Oct 2016 before the presidential elections bringing Gen. Michel Aoun to the top of the state pyramid took place on October 31st 2016.

It was rather an **"Identity of a Victim"** as per one of the facilitators that both Alawites and Sunnis on all ends of the different zones shared. An identity that is fueled by the unclear "transitional justice process" pertained to the "Security Plan" which is implemented by numerous Lebanese security agencies and resulted, according to participants from both sides, "to the imprisonment of over 3000 of their youth and men (2000 in Roumieh prison and 1000 in Tripoli prisons)" as well as "tens of exiled men from Jabal Mohsen into Syria who decided to flee the country after the security plan". This along "six thousand fugitives" in what is called "communications documents – *watha'eq ittisal*" that also restrained the mobility of thousands of youth and men in these areas without a clear track of civil justice especially that most of these cases were referred to the Military Court[3]. Most of the former fighters noted that there needs to be some sort of **amnesty** for them; which is why, it is believed by the project team that most of them kept referring to the importance of electing a President of the Republic, since it falls under his special authorities to declare a "general amnesty – *Aafou Aam*"[4].

The common feeling of discrimination along with the restrictions in freedoms of both Sunnis and Alawites living in the conflict zones along with their distrust in the political institutions were not the only commonalities. In fact, these are just few among many; a matter that got a lot of participants surprised when shared with them during the feedback sessions. Most of these commonalities revolved around **"Human Security"** on all its different levels including the economic, health, food, personal, environmental, political and community security. One striking finding for the group of researchers was to know that hundreds of families

> **"In poverty we live in weakness; in war we are empowered"**

who live the government residential housing project in Qobbe - **Al Hariri Compound** are illegally occupying these houses after they have fled the different frontlines during the clashes and they currently face trials alone with no legal support or aid. One of the participants living in Al Hariri communal housing illegally said to us "for both of us (Sunnis and Alawites) living in these apartments[5], a new round of clashes would put these files into the drawers and we would preserve our shelter".

Prominent among the concerns of both communities is the sense of deprivation which always made itself felt while conducting the communal conversations through the obvious **deteriorating infrastructure**, half completed construction sites, buildings that are falling apart, along with what was reported about the very high levels of **poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment**; the youth in particular telling the facilitators that they have little hope for a future outside their communities where opportunities for steady income are practically

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[3] A special court that is initially set up to look into disputes and matters of formal Lebanese Armed Forces personnel
[4] In January 1989, a committee appointed by the Arab League suggested a general amnesty for all Lebanese former fighters and militias, which was passed by the Lebanese Parliament in March 1991 pardoning all political crimes prior to its enactment.
[5] According to one of the participants in the communal conversations who occupy an apartment in Al Hariri Communal Housing project, there are around 200 occupied apartments, 50 on the Alawite side and 150 on the Sunni side. But these numbers aren't investigated by the RRT team yet.

nonexistent. "You might look forward to a brighter future if there was a decent present." Or, "In poverty we live in weakness; in war, we are empowered and better-off." – even from those whose houses had been burnt down several times, some prefer war because during the clashes they lived for a long period with some power and self-esteem in contrast to the present with its absence of dignity. They also mentioned that they didn't pay for any services during the clashes; now they have to pay. Others stated that "we were better off during the clashes, there was cash being poured into our regions", "my husband used to receive enough money for us to live when he was fighting, but now we have nothing, literally nothing." The levels of poverty in these areas are striking, and stories of basic needs are never ending. Even though the conversations were not needs assessments but nevertheless these issues were at the forefront in a lot of the discussions.

Participants describing the outcomes of the clashes

"Before talking about reconciliation, we need to eat first. We don't have jobs"; "When I lost my husband I lost my main source of income. Now I have to go look for a job to sustain a living for me and my family"; "We cannot pay lawyers to defend our relatives in courts. Poverty means lack of support."; "When we enter hospitals, our ID's would be confiscated because we cannot pay and then it's another layer of lack of security"; "I don't have money to register my daughter in the public school." Also illiteracy was an obvious crosscutting commonality among many of the participants from both regions, in some groups almost three quarters of attendees didn't know how to read and write; hence making it almost impossible for them to find any decent jobs that would provide a pay to sustain their families. The lack of interest in education was mainly noted among men more so than women from these areas since very few men mentioned this as a priority or issue while women, even those illiterate,

> "Before talking about reconciliation, we need to eat first. We don't have jobs."

said they wish their children wouldn't have to face the same future. And while this issue is related to career opportunities and employability it also relates to the mothers' fear on the lives of their children, especially the boys, who they think without proper employment might end up participating in the militias. At least a few of the youth who participated in the conversations and reported that they had taken part in the fights are now in their early twenties and therefore in 2008 and onwards, these were child soldiers most of whom had dropped out of school at an early stage.

Another pressing topic, but one of rather wider consent, is the **increase in drug addiction among youth** which was reported among various groups on both sides of the conflict but also covering different community groups. And even though these groups agreed that the situation in their neighborhoods had gotten a lot worse, with no sign of letting up, they disagreed on who to blame for it. Sunni groups referred this to a strategic plan that Hizballah had designed and is currently implemented in order to destroy the youth generation while Alawites framed drug dealership as intentionally overlooked by the security forces and politicians for their own corrupt interests. Some participants also referred to lack of awareness and low self-esteem as well as absence of proper family support and guidance. Even the protective parents mentioned that it is creating issues for them with their children because they are not allowing them to go out more often in order to prevent them from being exposed to any drug experiences. But they admit that even this cannot be a permanent solution.

In reference to permanence, a very wide perception that the vast majority of those engaged in the conversations agreed to is that the current situation cannot be defined as "Peace" but rather as a "**Ceasefire**". In fact, a "Fragile Ceasefire," not a permanent one, is what many kept referring to. Residents live in a swirl of continuous rumors that some sort of clashes or conflicts will come back and it is only a matter of time for the situation to get as bad as it was before and perhaps even worse. And for them, rumors are always time bound to "after a holiday or vacation or Eid" as if it wasn't allowed for these people to enjoy any major celebrations but to continue to live in fear of what the future will bring. "Fear of the other," which breeds hate and justifies separation, is widespread. Some even went on to say that this is a Lebanese Army "Forced Ceasefire" and that one major signal that the clashes will return would be "if the Lebanese Army withdraws from our regions or if they leave their checkpoints". One respondent mentioned that only the Commander of the **Lebanese Armed Forces** can be the leader of the reconciliation process because he's seen as somehow neutral and can play a mediator/facilitator role.

In discussions with the expert facilitators it was pointed out by one that "identities are not necessarily constant, but rather in a constant shifting mode," that "most of participants in conversations or interviews have constructed their identities on fear." In fact, some of the most striking remarks signaling high levels of intolerance were mentioned through unpacking **identity** related issues. "All Alawites are Syrians, they should be rid of their Lebanese nationality since they only got it because of Syrian presence in Lebanon", "During the

> **"Most of participants in conversations or interviews have constructed their identity on fear."**

Ottoman era, all this area was under the rule of Alawites, all the way until Byblos, we don't understand why they say we are Syrians and not Lebanese although we have a long history here", "The Alawite sect was only acknowledged in Lebanon recently, during the Taif Agreement, so they're part of the remnants of the Syrian regime occupation", "How can we have ownership to a common Lebanese identity when we see the state captured by Hizballah who fights in Syria so openly and bluntly while any Sunni who wants to fight in Syria ends up in jail." There appears to be some common identities based on the discussions though, mainly the "victim identity" as aforementioned, but also that of being "a resident of the conflict zones" versus that of being from the calmer and more prosperous parts of the city. This can surely be a source of instability as discrimination or even the perceptions of it always feed into the hatred and disagreement rhetoric. Another major issue related to the topic of identity, but in its tangible representation, the team ran into the issue of *Maktoomee al Qayd* "Non-ID persons" during the feedback sessions. According to some participants from both communities, there are thousands of cases of Lebanese residents who have no IDs in this area, hence they have no access to services and extremely vulnerable to security forces abuses and harassments. This issue was further highlighted especially by Alawite community after they lost their *Mukhtars* representation in the last municipal elections.

For their part, despite describing themselves as Syrians, Alawites interviewed said they feel no strong connection to the state; they have little **representation** in parliament, little presence in the security forces. In addition, they were not represented in the current Tripoli Municipal Council which was elected in the summer of 2016. They lack any sense of ownership in the institutions of government that are supposed to serve them. This sense of alienation expresses itself in many ways. One respondent put it succinctly: "We believe in Bashar Al Assad. We are free to have our opinion and we're with the regime."

These disparate senses of self-definition, the team was inclined to attribute to the practice of self-isolation. Few, left their neighborhoods[6], fearing they would be harmed if they entered the other; hence their prejudicial attitudes towards each other was largely the product of hearsay of how the other lived and stories of how they had behaved during the clashes.

Because both communities live in closed environments, their **collective memories of war**, either real or mythological, become the bonds of their shared realities. The belief that war is impending is the cement that holds social cohesion together. When asked who was to blame for the simmering conflict between the two

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[6] For Sunnis residing in Bab Al Tabbaneh, Qobbe, Mankoubeen, and Baddawi, there is nothing in Jabal Mohsen that would entail them to visit the neighborhood such as public institutions or governmental offices nor businesses and services. While Alawites are forced to get out more often, not necessarily into these neighborhoods but to Tripoli at large, to perform daily activities.

communities, each always said "the other – also including the politicians representing "the other." When asked who was responsible for the wars in earlier years, the response was the same: "the other." All took solace in being the victim, the wraparound of a shared identity. In discussion the team noted that this added another layer of complexity to the conflict: when both sides see themselves as the aggrieved party, it is difficult for either to empathize with the humanity of the other. Each holds the other fully to blame. Revenge is frequently mentioned, whether in relation to the civil war or more recent clashes.

Another issue that figured very prominently in the conversations concerned **Syrian refugees**; their influx in huge numbers is a matter of grievance and resentment in Bab al Tabbaneh as well as Jabal Mohsen. In conversations there residents complained that while they were extremely poor, the government and international community were helping the refugees who now were better off than they were. The Syrian refugees, they said "are competing with the Lebanese and pushing down wages. Apartment rents are higher." And few went as far to say that "as long as the Syrians continue to flood these neighborhoods then an incoming unrest is inevitable especially that they take the jobs of communities from all confessions." As if a new "Other" was being created.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Assaad Chaftari presenting along with the RRT team the findings of the research during the feedback sessions in Bab al Tabbaneh, March 2017

Just as the project's findings are both general and specific, the team understands that with the variety of donors, INGOs, local NGOs, political parties, interest groups, and other stakeholders involved or planning to get involved in the city of Tripoli, it is important to lay out the holistic picture and invite everyone to consider being part of this huge endeavor. It is by no means a one team or even a civil society effort only. But the FCT Tripoli delegation aims through this RRT project to help in framing the issue and to highlight the best approaches or recommendations for interventions. At this stage, we're also interested in pilot interventions that would be catalytic and mobilize large numbers of neighborhood residents to believe in the process and be willing to engage and lead it on the long run. The Tripoli FCT's emphasis on implementation comes from the forum's belief that this will secure a higher level of buy-in from the residents of Jabal Moshen, Qobbe, and Bab al Tabbaneh, crucial at this stage to the success of the RRT's project; to reiterate the fact that the team did not just listen to them and walk away but felt obliged to return the degree of trust they had shown to the team by addressing some of the specific problems they had brought to the team's notice. This sense of "togetherness," that to the Tripoli FCT and its members their lives had parity of esteem with our own, that they had not been used and not forgotten as has been their lot too often in the past, is the switch that will ultimately shed light on our way forward. Below are major interventions and recommendations from the research:

I. RESEARCH:

Communal Conversations: The initial attempt to gauge the perceptions of a small sample from Bab al Tabbaneh, Qobbe, and Jabal Mohsen proved successful in the sense that it reflected a clear desire[7] of the residents in these conflict zones to speak and be listened to. For some, this signaled interest of the facilitators in their issues and grievances. While others went to highlight that the fact someone is engaging them in such conversations and listening to them is "a matter of restoring part of [their] dignity and self-respect." Therefore, it was agreed among experts that "listening is part of the healing" and the exercise should continue while engaging greater numbers of residents in similar communal conversations or different forms of dialogue sessions that can become a usual part of their lives. These can be described as "Communal Peace Talks".

*Surveying a **larger sample** from the area* in order to get more accurate data on innumerable aspects of life in both communities, to probe issues impossible to know in the environment in which the team operated; to compensate for the fact of many who partook in the conversation, to analyze by demographics – age gender, and other variables; and investigate in depth what underlines the sentiment that for the residents of both communities, the announcement that there is a ceasefire does not mean the war is over. In short, the team understands that the qualitative data it gathered needs to be supplemented by more hard data going forward.

*Research to establish the **Tripoli Reconciliation Barometer***: One of the major limitations of the research that led to "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli" project is that it was mainly based on qualitative data collected through the communal conversations therefore the need for a quantitative tool to monitor and assess the readiness and willingness of the residents of the conflict zones to engage in a reconciliation process, and later on assess its progress would be of critical importance. This research will examine the Rwandan Reconciliation Barometer, which was inspired originally by the South African Reconciliation Barometer to determine how the best practices of both tools can be adapted for a "Tripoli Reconciliation Barometer (TRB)". The TRB will be the quantitative monitoring tool to assess the progress of the "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli" project.

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[7] in some cases facilitators described it as a "need"

II. HUMAN SECURITY:

Enhancing Human Security is also a critical component which is surely not a civil society role solely but rather a holistic approach that should be led by the Government of Lebanon, Municipality of Tripoli, international community, donors, INGOs, local NGOs, and all interested stakeholders but some major points to highlight which are of utmost importance for the residents of the conflict zones are:

a. The importance of working with *former fighters*[8] from Jabal Moshen, Bab al Tabbaneh, and Qobbe through encouraging them to work together in their communities cannot be overemphasized. The fact that the residents would see and hear them, understand that these were individuals that once were mortal enemies and that they have enjoined in a common effort to stop the violence and reshape the relationship between their communities would have a lasting powerful impact. It gives credence to the process whereby residents become more willing to put their suspicions on hold, they would be more forthcoming, particularly the youth, many of whom see fighters as role models and themselves as fighters following in the footsteps of other members of their extended families.

The important conclusion here is that in any reconciliation process former fighters must be at the forefront. They must spearhead programs that will help to break down these obstacles of distrust and suspicion, and that a beginning in this regard might be made by having former fighters bring small groups of young people from one area into the other to meet small groups of young people there just for the purpose of having them converse among themselves about how they live and why they see the "other" as someone out to destroy them, of course in a facilitated and phased manner in order to get them to build trust first before having to be faced with very debatable issues. *We recommend learning from and engaging "Fighters for Peace" who shared some of the tools that can be used in such efforts.* For example, documentary films are one of the tools; theater plays/playback Theater is another tool. Also joint camps can be a great tool whereby former fighters can be mixed with students and other youth. And the fourth tool would be dialogue sessions whereby they tell their story to students and others and open the floor for discussions. And finally exhibitions focusing on the positive relations during or before the clashes but also advocating for better live can make the former fighters play a positive change agents role. This is the main idea behind the

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[8] The RRT as of early 2017 has access to over 100 former fighters who are willing to engage in various types of personal and community development programs.

reintegration of former fighters who might be involved in various types of activities and social initiatives while being supported to gain back a decent living through skills or vocational training. But a major component of any engagement with them shall be the **Psychosocial Support** and follow up in order to help treat their traumas.

b. **Healthcare** was identified as a major need with numerous examples mentioned regarding the frustration created by its absence or low quality especially during the conflict period. And albeit it is the role of the Ministry of Health and that of the Ministry of Social Affairs through the Social Development Centers to provide this service, there are few important recommendations that might lead to reduction in the anxiety and frustration levels for residents.

    i. Establishing a **Lebanese Red Cross Center** (or point of presence through few ambulances) in Jabal Mohsen and near the conflict zones.

    ii. Opening the **Social Development Center** in Jabal Mohsen[9] as soon as possible knowing that it will be the first governmental/official presence of any ministerial office in the neighborhood.

    iii. Establish an office for the MOSA program of supporting the **handicapped** in the conflict zones[10] focusing primarily on creating opportunities and providing healthcare for those who were injured or handicapped because of the clashes.

    iv. Provide low cost **insurance programs** for the most vulnerable communities that could be subsidized either by private sector contributions or some sort of a matching program allowing for large scale health sponsorships.

    v. Increasing monitoring and insuring equality and fair healthcare provision by the Ministry of Health (MoH) at the **Public Hospital** local in Riva, Qobbe.

    vi. Studying with the Lebanese Armed Forces the potentials of putting back **Al Zahraa Hospital** in Jabal Mohsen back in operations for the general public with discounted rates, might be under the LAF as part of their civil-military-cooperation (CIMIC) program.

    vii. Special attention to be given to **Drugs prevention awareness and rehabilitation** for scores of residents, especially youth, living in both communities hoping to mobilize them against the widespread of drug use. There is surely a need to open centers for rehabilitation that can be

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[9] There are currently two SDCs in the region, one in Bab al Tabbaneh and another in Qobbe. The Jabal Mohsen SDC was delayed mainly for political reasons according to some interviewees.

[10] The office that provides such support is currently located in Abo Samra which is not within the conflict zones and some of the beneficiaries voiced concerns about their mobility and ability to go there.

accessible for local community either by collaborating with NGOs or the Ministry of Social Affairs, or both.

c. **Food security** through urban agriculture and food bank initiatives for the most vulnerable communities who became dependent on the political parties' food ratios and parcels. Social entrepreneurship initiatives might help through innovating solutions that links technology to the latest inventions in urban agriculture and hence providing jobs while enhancing the food security of residents.

i. Any initiatives targeting food security can and should take into consideration that Bab al Tabbaneh hosts the largest **vegetables market** in Lebanon with tons of vegetables wasted annually which can be used in processing and stored for gradual usage by vulnerable groups.

d. **Education** might be one of the most important aspects if not the most, in providing personal security in the sense of creating opportunities, raising awareness, supporting in self-determination and actualization, and transforming behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, major interventions are recommended to reduce the dropout rates, engage dropouts in alternative education methods, enhance the provision of the service in the public schools, engage the parents more in the education process of their children, and linking the education directly to opportunities in the market.
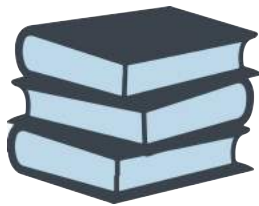
i. Mobilize volunteers and seek funded programs to teach **basic literacy** in an attempt to prevent dropouts and raise the chances for the youth from this area to be accepted in universities. English language classes are essential but on a long term programs especially that most public schools in the area teach in French and Arabic which does not help the chances of these kids to find relevant jobs.

ii. Advocate to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) to create alternative tracks in public schools to teach in **English language** since it's proven to be an easier language to learn and more relevant in terms of linking it to technology and the job market.

iii. Engage the youth, former fighters, women, handicapped, and other potentially productive sectors in relevant and up-to-date **vocational training programs** in case they don't have a

previous skill or if they want to enhance it especially those directly linked to the market needs.

iv. Scale up programs that are subsidizing or supporting **scholarships** for school and university students regardless of whether they were in private or public schools as long as they are conditioned to pay back to the community through either tutoring younger children or providing community services depending on their new sets of skills and knowledge.

v. Create **innovation centers and spaces** whereby the youth in the region can get exposed to new types of technological skills that would also enhance their employability.

e. **Employment and job opportunities** ranked very high on the menu of demands of all the groups who were researched but the interventions and recommendations shall be tailored based on their skills, mobility[11], legal status, previous experience, age, and various other criteria. This is why it is not enough to rely on traditional job creation interventions.

i. Reviving **Nano, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises** (NMSMEs) that were either downsized or on the verge of closing because of the clashes through tailored Business Development Services (BDS), coaching, and mentorship

ii. Providing support to business through **Social Marketing** their products as post-conflict reviving brands

iii. Promoting **Social Entrepreneurship** as innovative means to create businesses for those who lack mobility or access to resources

iv. Work on providing **access to finance** opportunities for local businesses and startups either through advocating for banks to open branches, give more loans to residents of the conflict zones, or support micro-finance enterprises in their effort to expand the pool of beneficiaries through preparing there beneficiaries with BDS

v. Promoting **skills-based training through internships** to match the market needs and facilitate employment

vi. Encourage private sector to participate in city based **job fairs**

vii. Advocate for large infrastructure and mega projects that can hire thousands of employees such as the **Tripoli Special Economic Zone, the Port, the Qlayaat Airport, the Tripoli-Syria**

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[11] Thousands of youth from the conflict zones are subject to being arrested if they are stopped at security forces checkpoints because of what is called "communications documents" or watha'eq ittisal. These are internal security forces intelligence reports that are not necessarily based on proper investigation but can rather be speculations but it highly limits the ability of these men and youth to move around in the city.

Railway, Gas and Oil Station, and Tripoli Digital District. Putting the Access to Information Law in practice, support the development of local interest and advocacy groups to follow up the implementation and approvals on all the aforementioned projects.

viii. **Psychological and life-skills** support to prepare youth and other employees for job placement

f. **Inclusive Urban Strategy**[12] relying on a study that was conducted in 2015 which can be revisited and broadened in terms of scope and specificity but for the time-being it can serve as an important benchmark to the Urban design thinking especially in coordination with the Municipality of Tripoli and the Union of Al Fayhaa Municipalities. This strategy shall take into consideration as well the specific yet immensely urgent needs of residents depending on their neighborhoods, for example in **Baal Al Darawish** area there needs to be a swift intervention to prevent two buildings from falling over tens of families. These buildings need to be either brought down or retained but the Municipality and the High Relief Commission should be moving fast before any disaster occurs. On the other hand, the issue of the **Hariri Compound** Community Housing shall be sorted out in a fair yet humane whereby families affected (claims say up to 200 families) should not be facing evacuations without preparing alternatives especially that these apartments were illegally occupied mainly fleeing the conflicts.

i. Special attention shall be given to the deteriorating **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)** conditions including eroding networks, flooding underground basements of buildings, and special attention should be given to both water and sewage networks that are shared by conflicting communities and had been used during the clashes as a weapon therefore trust needs to be revived in these services. A big role can be played here by the Ministry of Power and Natural Recourses and North Lebanon Water Establishment.

ii. The **urban strategy** shall serve different major functions that the conflict zones can potentially play in the overall developmental role in the city. A transportation node or hub, a medical hub, or even a recycling and waste management hub; all of which can provide jobs but also create more linkages between the two sides of the city, in that we refer to the well-off side on one hand and the impoverished, underdeveloped side on another hand.

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[12] The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action* Plan that was developed for the Development Office in the Municipality of Tripoli through support from the United States Agency for International Development, Office of Transition Initiatives in 2014 can be found on the following link: http://tripolidev.org/?page_id=4725

g. The feeling of **victimization** and long-lasting perceptions of **injustice** need to be given particular special attention because it is believed to be one of the main triggers for anxious youth to engage in hostile activities. Therefore, legal aid and advocacy towards the Ministry of Justice and the Prisons Establishments are critical interventions.

   i. **Human rights awareness** for the most vulnerable youth who might be subject to harassment and blackmailing from some local security forces personnel can provide a feeling of safety for these youth and get them to know their rights and how to protect themselves by the law.

   ii. Involving **CIMIC** in open conversations with former fighters and other youth who might have a very negative image about LAF that needs to be changed through gradual interventions.

   iii. **Human rights monitor** and hotline for legal support in case they cannot pay for lawyers and do not want to rely on the traditional political legal aid that is usually conditional of electoral support.

   iv. Advocacy for the fair and correct closure of the **Islamic detainees issue**

   v. Psychological, communal and economic **integration of ex-prisoners** who served their sentences in jail.

h. Since the presence of **Syrian refugees** on both sides of the conflicting communities was raised up as problematic there needs to be an inclusive and participatory approach taken by the municipality of Tripoli or the Union of AL Fayha'a Municipalities in coordination and collaboration with the Ministry of Labor (MoL) and the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) to create local coordination neighborhood and coordination committees to initiate dialogue and insure fair treatment and opportunities to all concerned parties. Businessmen in particular voices out that more Syrian shop-owners are competing with them in the souks and they might not be paying taxes or other dues therefore they don't get the same treatment. On the other hand a large portion of youth and women also raised their frustration that they are not having jobs and that rental fees became much higher because of the Syrian refugees presence in the city.

i. The role that local and national **Political Parties** can play through establishing dialogue roundtables around Tripoli not only on high level of politicians but in all the different sectors such as politically affiliated university students, syndicates, academians, private sector, religious leaders, and so on and so forth. There needs to be an all-tracks dialogue between political parties both local and national in support of the transitional process of Tripoli towards reconciliation.

III. PROMOTING PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE

a. Most, if not all, interventions aforementioned under human security should be tailored taking into consideration the levels of trauma and psychological problems that participant might be facing. It is with no doubt that the psychological side of any intervention might play a major role in its success or failure. It is recommended that going forward, a special unit(s) be created by the Ministry of Health in coordination with other ministries such as Education and Higher Education as well as Social Affairs, in the conflict zones to cater for the **psychological wellbeing** of the residents especially those who were most affected by the conflict. In lieu of that, and meanwhile it's being advocated for, civil society and private sector healthcare centers can play an important role in such services. This will surely raise the prospects of any peaceful solution and reconciled communities.

b. Creating the momentum and supporting the overall peace effort through different positive **media messaging** and public service announcements, social media short movies, and other targeted but mass communications tools.

c. The **city's image** is surely a shared interest for both communities who see that in many cases it was intentionally disrupted in the media for political purposes, even though the two sides might not agree on the agenda or the reasons. But enhancing the city's reputation through promoting it as a touristic, cultural, and economic hub was also highlighted by the residents and needs not only the municipality and Ministry of Tourism to play a role but also the private sector to step in.

d. Encouraging continuous and ongoing public peace events in the previous areas of conflict especially the abandoned public gardens or green placements that are located on proximity from both communities or right on the border between them aiming at **normalizing peace** for residents and getting them used to the fact that joint activities and interactions are the norm.

e. Investing in all the public spaces to do **peace through sports** activities whereby these can be used to raise the youths' morale, create opportunities to interact and communicate, reduce stress and develop a healthier psychosocial wellbeing for them.

f. Promote **Peace Education** programs in schools such as violence free schools using:

    i. Anti-sectarianism/Anti-racism toolkit

    ii. Joint intercommunal community projects on all previous frontlines by school students and teachers

    iii. Peace camps

    iv. Training teachers on nonviolence tools and integrating that into mainstream education

    v. In collaboration with clergy and religious representatives, conduct training and awareness sessions on co-existence and tolerance.

g. Humanizing the conflict to reduce the **feel of victimization** either through exposing both sides to the "others" narrative and/or helping in delivering their message and making their voices heard using creative and well-tested approaches such as theater of witness and other drama therapy related interventions.

h. **Dealing with the past** might be a large title but is surely very critical and important to understanding what happened in the past and reconstructing a public rhetoric based on what its components entail i.e. through highlighting the benefits/profits of peace without the rumors and continuous political abuse of unclear and vague history which surfaces at every political milestone, whether local, national, or regional. It shall also include, paying respect to the memory of those who have been lost during these recurrent clashes or even during the civil war[13] in a way that satisfies their families. Also linking the families of the disappeared to local or international NGOs working on this file such as International Committee of Red Cross is definitely a needed intervention.

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[13] During the conversations, the issue of mass graves and not knowing where the bodies of family members were buried during the Syrian occupation of the city came out several times.

CONCLUSION

One of the key elements that the researchers used in their approach to develop the "Roadmap to Reconciliation in Tripoli" was to bring fresh eyes to a long-standing taboo which is reconciliation, since it needed to be introduced with as little prejudices and assumptions as possible. This not only enriched our data collection phase but also the analysis and recommendations later on. A step backward from decades of joint expertise was needed to prep this research for the road of thousand miles as it is obvious from the recommendations part, which was limited in terms of programmatic development due to constrained resources, that in deed building a reconciled community in the city of Tripoli will need years and years of dedication and very specific programming if and only if the local community is willing and capable of engaging and leading these interventions.

During the nine months that stretched between July 2016 and March 2017, the research passed through all the five stages of establishing the committee, designing the research, data collection through CCs and KIIs, analysis engaging local and international experts both in Tripoli and Bulgaria, and finally the feedback sessions that were held to discuss the findings with local communities and start the thinking process of "what's next" with them. But one essential component of this whole cycle was that it launched an iterative process of listening to the residents of Jabal Moshen, Bab al Tabbaneh, Qobbe, and Mankobeen who haven't been used in the past to being listened to. We believe that through this component, two major processes have started: the first be it discussing the idea of reconciliation and showing that it is not as perceived – a taboo that only politicians can control but rather a communal process that they can own. And second to that is the opportunity for residents to vent out their concerns and issues. This is believed to be a first step into breaking the chains that have constrained them from healing and moving forward to embark on a journey into their hearts and minds that will, with perseverance and persistence, lead them to see each other as brothers and sisters bound in a common effort to discover their humanity. And the FCT – Tripoli Delegation will be with them.

The team understands that many of the recommendations are longer term interventions that will be affected by a myriad of variables on local, national, regional and maybe even international levels. This makes many of those interventions outside the RRT team's resources, competence, and ability to influence. But on the other hand, a lot of the recommendations are achievable and feasible especially if coalitions and networks are created to direct key stakeholders and local residents together in a transformational master plan for these neighborhoods. For many this may be a farfetched dream but for us, it is a vision that invites likeminded good-will'ers and good-doers to join hands in creating a new future for the city of Tripoli through a grassroots movement that puts

forward a communal reconciliation between the residents of the conflict zones in the city while mobilizing all the resources and networks to support the development and strengthen the foundations of this reconciliation through a multiple phases long term process.

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