



SUCCESS STORY

National Bus Tour Links Youth to Promote Peace



Students from Beirut, Saida, Aley, Tripoli, and Doha High Schools joined the bus in Beirut to acknowledge their role in advancing national unity to prevent another civil war.

“I would like to extend my appreciation for bringing different NGOs together to spread the culture of peace and coexistence, and to encourage youth to stay away from violence. With such initiatives and great effort of many activists, eventually all of these efforts will bear fruit and will push future generations to adopt peaceful approaches to conflict.”

—Lebanese President Michel Suleiman in a letter to Zico House

May 2009 – Youth activists from diverse sectarian backgrounds took messages of peace to thousands of people across Lebanon in a “peace bus” tour this spring. The trip commemorated Lebanon’s Civil War—symbolically making 34 stops to mark the 34 years since the conflict ended in 1975—as well as the anniversary of the May 2008 clashes.

For a month, the bus served as home to a dynamic crew of youth activists, journalists, cameramen, and storytellers brought together by local arts organization Zico House. The high-profile tour enabled activists to highlight their work, share lessons learned, and increase nongovernmental organization (NGO) collaboration across Lebanon. The tour also linked partners of USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives working on dialogue and peace-building initiatives throughout the country.

“Dialogue is the key to peace. Everything should be solved through dialogue, not violent conflict,” said one of the young activists. This sentiment was shared by those on the bus who felt, for the first time, a shared responsibility to raise awareness and build a network of youth activists to support peace and nonviolence.

Local peace-building events punctuated the route. In the southern village of Nabatiyeh, the Youth Network for Civic Activism held a Civil War photo exhibition. In the northern village of Berqayel, 800 residents took part in a 2-kilometer walk for peace organized by Hadatha and Creative Youth for Akkar. And in Hermel, a village in the Beqaa, youths from Creadel-Liban performed a play on sectarianism and conflict.

The month-long tour, which was heavily covered in the media, ended in Beirut, where some 2,500 youth and civic activists from across Lebanon converged to greet the bus. To celebrate its return, participating NGOs performed peace songs, staged short plays, and showcased their activities. It was one of the only peaceful—and large—gatherings to take place prior to the country’s recent parliamentary elections.

Following the tour, Zico House produced a documentary that highlighted testimonials from villagers and activists on their memories of the war, revealing similar experiences of violence and loss in many communities. The group hopes the tour and film will help the country face the past so it can build a future.