



**THE  
LEBANON: OTHER REFUGEE CRISIS**

**OFFICIAL PROGRAMME REPORT**

## Lebanon: The Other Refugee Crisis

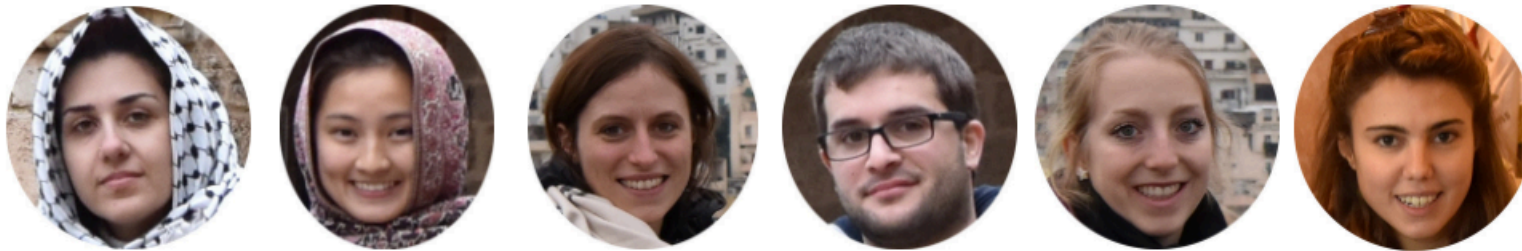
DFD's first ever programme in Lebanon granted exclusive access to some of the country's most contentious regions, political parties and social activists to form a group study of the nation's refugee crisis. Six delegates from five different countries met in central Beirut on 3rd January 2016 to begin a week long investigation into one of the world's most complicated political systems and its handling of an influx of refugees which now amounts to more than an quarter of Lebanon's population.

Besides visiting different refugee camps and organisations working to provide aid to their communities, the delegation would meet various political parties campaigning to implement vastly different policies toward managing the many problems resulting from the crisis.



Delegates at Hezbollah's meeting room in Mleeta, Nabatiyeh.

## The delegates



### LEFT TO RIGHT:

**Georgia Chalkouski**, Msc in International Development with previous employment at the Greek Council for Refugees. Georgia wrote a Masters dissertation on the education of Syrian Refugees and conducted extensive research in both Lebanon and Jordan before joining the programme in 2016.

**Yuen Ki To**, Msc in International Business and Chinese Enterprise. A Global Talent Sourcing Officer for AIESEC and the president of APAC ideas for Action Youth Initiative (forwarding UN approved Sustainable Development Goals). She is also the Director of Marketing and Communications on the bidding committee of Harvard Projects for Asian and International Relations (HPAIR) 2016 Asia Conference.

**Maria Blöcher**, having completed her Staatsexamen at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Maria worked as a research assistant and lecturer in Heidelberg, the German-European School Singapore and at King's College London, teaching classical German and Latin. She has volunteered with Studies without Borders, participated in Harvard's Model United Nations in Rome 2016, and worked for the Heidelberger International Institute for Conflict Research.

**Loic Martin**, currently completing a PHD in environmental geochemistry at the Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris - (IPGP), Loic specialises in the impact of mining on rivers and has travelled extensively throughout the world. He is especially interested in the relationship between science and political culture.

**Rebecca Marwage**, BA in International Relations from King's College London. Rebecca has participated in numerous Model United Nations projects including Harvard's World MUN in Seoul 2015. She is currently supporting the founding of a dance institute in Gaza Palestine, and has travelled and lived throughout the world.

**Carlotta Giacché**, Double Masters in International Trade from Sciences Po Paris University. Carlotta has studied a variety of topics in Middle Eastern politics and trade, with an emphasis on the Arab Spring. She speaks six different languages fluently.

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## tripoli

Lebanon's northernmost port city, Tripoli is both a major hub for Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and a traffic route for migrants crossing the mediterranean into Europe. The population of Tripoli also represent a majority of the country's Sunni population and is seen as the nation's most religiously conservative base. Clashes in recent years between the neighbourhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh (a Sunni stronghold) and Jabal Mohsen (an Allowite district) have burdened the city with a violent reputation and contributed to the massive decline in tourism to Lebanon as a whole. This old sectarian conflict was revived at the outbreak of the Syrian civil war; the Allowite community loyal to Assad's regime, and the Sunnis sympathetic to the rebels and jihadists fighting them.

All these factors help shape the nation's attitudes toward refugees, particularly those fleeing the Syrian war. Hady Dandan, a student of the Lebanese American University and local resident of Tripoli, led delegates through the city's Souks and described how sectarian identities are shaping perspectives. As with the majority of Lebanese politics, much is influenced heavily by foreign and religious interests.

Besides an introduction to the political and cultural background behind the refugee crisis, delegates were introduced to Lebanese culture by eating at one of the city's most famous breakfast kitchens, and tours of the Mansouri Great Mosque, the Citadel of Raymond de Saint Gilles and an artisanal soap factory near the souks, a traditional craft in Tripoli. Before departing Tripoli, delegates had the chance to visit the Rashid Karami International Exhibition Centre, one of the greatest examples of how the Lebanese Civil war stagnated the country's growth and development. Intended as a permanent fair ground and exhibition complex, it was never completed due to the outbreak of violence.



Citadel of Raymond de Saint Gilles, overlooking the port



## mleeta, Nabitiyeh

The second day was spent in the southernmost province of Nabitiyeh, in sight of the border and settlements in Israel. Hezbollah's 'Tourist Landmark of the Resistance' overlooks the entire region from a promontory that was previously the scene of heavy fighting throughout the 18 year long Israeli occupation and the following 2006 Invasion.

The Tourist Landmark has been created by Hezbollah as both an 'Open Air War Museum' containing sixty square kilometres of trenches, underground tunnels, abandoned and destroyed weaponry used by both sides on the conflict, and a propaganda site for promoting their cause. Before being given a guided tour of the site, delegates were invited to engage in an extremely unique opportunity for discussion and debate with two high profile Hezbollah representatives in the meeting room.

### THE DEBATE

Delegates were seated and served tea before beginning discussion with the representatives. We were not informed of their full names, nor permitted to take pictures of them for security reasons. They began by introducing us to the issues underlying Hezbollah's existence, principally the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the Palestinian Refugee Crisis caused by the Israeli conflict within Palestine itself.



Flag of Hezbollah, the 'Party of God'



DFD and Najda Now



Najda's recently built school



Children receiving christmas gift...



Singing and games lead by local...

For more information on Najda Now's work visit there site [here](#). Besides helping us organise the camp visit detailed below, DFD are currently working on a longer term fund raising mission for specific projects for Najda Now, to be updated on our site soon.

## FINDINGS FROM BEKAA VALLEY CAMPS



## AFTER MLEETA

After leaving the Tourist Landmark for tea with a local family in Nabitiyeh, the delegation got news that Hezbollah had conducted a roadside bombing during our discussion with them inside nearby Israel; the officials had warned the delegation an attack was imminent as a response to recent Israeli gunfire over the border. Thankfully nobody was fatally injured in this attack, however our planned visit to the UN separation wall was unfortunately cancelled by UN officials due to the heightened tensions.

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## bekaa valley - syrian encampments

### NAJDA NOW

Delegations for Dialogue established a partnership with the aid group Najda Now providing us the opportunity to visit Syrian camps within the Bekaa Valley bordering Syria. Before beginning the programme, DFD coordinators Ali Taha and Louis Gore-Langton visited the camps to get an assessment of the situation and to provide some resources to the camp residents for Christmas.

Najda Now was founded by Abed Al-Assiz, a Syrian expatriate who left his home in Munich at the beginning of the war in 2011 to found an organisation providing development for refugees living in Lebanon. Najda Now raises money for both basic developments within the camps (sanitation, travel, education) and creating workshops, art and drama therapy for the children.







Delegates in Hezbollah's meeting room



Discussing the refugee crisis with officials (o...



The open air museum displaying abandoned l...



An artistic display showing grave stones with...



Original trenches and tunnels

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After giving a diatribe on the foundations of Hezbollah's creation and continued purpose, they began to encourage delegates to challenge them as openly and freely as possible on any issues or questions they might have. Delegates posed questions such as the need for a military rather than purely diplomatic campaign against the state of Israel; the religious rhetoric of their movement and its significance to their campaign; their relationship and support for the state of Iran and other resistance movements such as Hamas; the corruption inside the Lebanese political system as a whole, and the future and potential end to the need for a resistance movement within Lebanon.

## FINDINGS ON THE REFUGEE CRISES

Their preoccupation with the Palestinian refugee crisis left little time for discussion of the more recent influx of Syrian migrants, but the delegation learnt two central perspectives underlying Hezbollah's cause -

- First, all Palestinian refugees have the right to return to Palestine, and the focus should be on achieving this in full rather than granting greater civil status to the long established refugee camps within Lebanon (whose people are greatly restrained by lack of such status).
- Second, the Syrian crisis is largely a secondary off shoot of Israeli influence in the region and the wider influence of the western governments that support them. Hezbollah are lending heavy military support to the Assad regime, and delegates were informed of Hezbollah's belief that Israel and the West have both created the war by destabilising the entire region through long term imperial influence and invasion, and continued support for radical Islamist opposition such as the Al-Nusra Front who have received military and medical aid throughout the conflict.

Delegates were driven through Zahlé, in the Bekaa valley, to reach some of the Syrian refugee camps enduring the worst conditions in Lebanon. Despite the camps being continually and forcibly moved by the Lebanese Army, Najda Now has managed to provide some level of establishment to these camps, most notably by building a primary school for the children.

The camps are spread sporadically throughout the Bekaa Valley since no large scale encampments are allowed to establish themselves, the standard and resources found amongst different camps and even within each camp can differ vastly.

All families living within the camps rent the land from Lebanese land owners, who largely extort their renters. They must spend \$600 per year order to gain a patch of land, and then a similar amount in order to construct a tent. The land owners provide no other resources to the refugees and have used violence to suppress legal complaints made against them for selling goods provided by outside sources meant as aid.

No protection is granted to the refugees, Najda Now have experienced difficulty encouraging parents to send their children to the newly built school since kidnappings and murders, for human trafficking and organ harvesting, are not uncommon and occur when the children stray outside the camps attempting to reach the school and shops.

All tents are completely improvised, UNHCR sheets are used on makeshift wooden frames, with little sanitation systems that are provided by Najda Now, almost zero healthcare facilities are available. Since the camps are technically illegal, it is often impossible to provide any official help from established organisations, and leaves the refugees open to all manor of extortion and exploitation.

Fruit picking and packaging sites nearby employ them on tiny salaries. Army checkpoints outside the camps prevent any movement outside the Bekaa valley and restrict access to local towns and shops. Some stores are open to provide set rations to each family in some areas of the camps.



Visit to Najda Now's refugee school



Standard makeshift house



Tea and discussion with refugee family



Two delegates with family elders



Family sharing their different stories



Local girls



New school equipment



UNHCR family document



Primary school students



Najda Now Headquarters



Discussing aid issues

## DISCUSSION AT NAJDA HEADQUARTERS

After a day at the camps, the delegation headed back to Beirut to discuss with Najda activists the situation in the camps in further detail. Many issues stand in the way providing better conditions to the refugees, many of them cultural as well as practical.

Some of the main problems raised by Najda were -

1. The highly contentious nature of the presence of refugees in Lebanon prevents the instantiation of any proper infrastructure into the camps or the establishment of long term medical aid and education for fears over naturalising their presence in Lebanon.
2. The forced movement of the camps (a regular procedure executed by the Lebanese Army) if only one mile further into the fields, also helps prevent this.
3. No policing or adequate law enforcement can protect them from abuse and violence, or the continued and open extortion by Lebanese landlords.
4. High birthrate is difficult to prevent due to taboos surrounding contraception and suspicion towards education on sexual health.
5. Bringing the many orphaned children into Lebanese families is illegal as adoption is not permissible under Islam or within Lebanese law.
6. The Lebanese educational system is under increased pressure as the country's educational institutions are struggling to host more than 200,000 Syrian students. Schools have had to resort to dividing lesson hour between Syrians and Lebanese students, greatly impacting educational standards for all.
7. There are fears that such strains on social services could resonate even after a potential end to the Syrian conflict.



Delegates with local activists



Local children



Local Boys



#### FINDINGS FROM AL RASHIDIYA CAMP:

- The issue of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon is naturally tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Any potential solution to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon is dependent on the future of the conflict.
- 'The Right of Return' has been the greatest challenge against granting them full civil status - maintaining their connection to Palestinian land and identity relies on their continued status as refugees in Lebanon.
- The issue of nationalisation has a demographic dimension that threatens the stability of the delicate sectarian system in Lebanon - the balance between rival sects could be offset by naturalising Palestinian refugees.
- Livelihood of refugees in the camps is also being threatened by decreasing foreign aid, principally by UNRWA.

## al-rashidiya palestinian camp

Whilst vast in scale, the Syrian influx of migrants throughout the past five years is something Lebanon as a nation has experienced before, and continues to deal with to this day. Having received hundreds of thousands of Palestinians since the 'Nakba' in 1948, Lebanon established separated communities for Palestinian refugees awaiting an end to the conflict.

Rashidiya camp houses an estimated 30,000 refugees and is one of the oldest in the country, founded in 1949, its inhabitants can see across the border to the town in which many of them used to live. Our delegation was granted access to the camp and invited to tour the camps' secondary school with the director of the camp, and meet many local community activists. With us was the head of the Palestinian Club at the Lebanese American University, Muhammed Hammad, himself a refugee resident of Nahr Al Bared camp in the north of Lebanon.



Discussion with Camp Director a...



Camp streets



Al Aqsa Secondary School



Delegates with local activists



Local children





## lebanese forces party

Delegates met with two high profile Lebanese Forces Party members, to discuss their perspectives on the refugee crisis and how it should be dealt with. Jad Demian, the president of the Lebanese Forces Student Association was keen to answer the different inquiries of the delegates in a formal two hour meeting.

LFP are a Christian Democratic organisation that have proved one of the most effective parties in Lebanon at disarming since the end of the civil war.



Flag of the Lebanese Forces Party

### PROPOSALS RAISED BY LEBANESE FORCES

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1. Lebanon is seriously strained under the influx of Syrian Refugees on top of the Palestinian communities, and the government's response must be to prioritise the welfare of Lebanese citizens first.
2. The United Nations should create, under international pressure, a camp within Syria to house all displaced people fleeing the conflict there. This would provide all required aid and protection currently unavailable in Lebanon, and would be forced on the Assad regime as a humanitarian requirement.
3. Granting greater rights to Palestinians within Lebanon will only deteriorate the situation further, causing strain on Lebanese society and not delivering the right of return to Palestine - even worsening the chances of a resolution to the conflict.
4. Above all, the best thing Lebanon can do to aid those coming from the Syrian and Palestinian conflicts is to prioritise their own nation and people first, and in doing so force surrounding states to do the same.



Discussions with LFP



Debating solutions to refugee crises



Jad Demian addressing delegates

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## progressive socialist party

The Progressive Socialist Party is a member of Socialist International and has been campaigning in Lebanon under the Jumblatt family for many decades. Delegates met at a headquarters in downtown Beirut to discuss their alternative views and proposals for solutions to the refugee crises.

Senior Media Officer of PSP and Editor in Chief of Al Anbaa Newspaper Rami el-Rayess gave a formal introduction of the party to the delegation and answered any questions they had.

### PROPOSALS RAISED BY PROGRESSIVE SOCIALISTS -

1. Established camps such as those achieved for Palestinian refugees should also be created for Syrian refugees.
2. Palestinians should be granted greater civil status and further incorporated into Lebanese society.
3. All parties should be working together to help aid displaced peoples within all Arab countries.
4. Nationalism, such as that propounded by LFP is divisive and serving to further the plight of refugees.
5. The UN should be forced to help create large and established camps that could provide refugees with necessary resources and aid within Lebanon.
6. Gulf States, though helping aid the refugees already, could do a great deal more.



PSP emblem (a rare inclusion of the pen, symbolising intellectualism, in the communist logo)



Rami el-Rayess introducing PSP



Further Discussions

