

Community-Based Dialogues for Reconciliation in Libya

Tribal, ethnic, political, and regional differences have fueled a state of protracted conflict in Libya that began after the fall of longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in August 2011. The situation has worsened since the July 2014 elections, and the current landscape of social and political polarization has left many groups marginalized and divided. Many local conflicts are grounded in long-standing feuds among various tribes and ethnic groups, adding new layers of rivalries which will hamper national-level peace agreements if left unaddressed.



USIP's Community-Based Dialogues for Reconciliation in Libya project uses dialogue to increase positive communication and trust within and between conflict-affected communities in Libya. Through this project, USIP has trained 40 Libyans, including youth and women, in conflict resolution, transitional justice, and dialogue facilitation. So far, these individuals have used their skills to facilitate five dialogues in which nearly 400 people participated, with hundreds more involved in the related post-dialogue activities. These trained individuals and facilitated dialogues are meant to lay the groundwork for a transitional justice process after a peace settlement.

SEBHA

The southern city of **Sebha** is still actively struggling with tribal-based conflict. To help build trust through collaboration, USIP administered three dialogue processes in Sebha: the first aimed to bring the city's groups together to address the issue of celebratory gunfire; the second focused on youth participation in reconciliation initiatives; and the third focused on the role of women in peacebuilding. The youth dialogue about reconciliation initiatives was particularly successful—participants from different tribal backgrounds demonstrated a surprising level of willingness to discuss conflict- and reconciliation-related issues and expressed interest in being involved in peacebuilding efforts—eventually beginning a forum to take tangible action together.

UBARI

Between 2014 and 2016, the southern city of **Ubari** was locked in a devastating local violent conflict. To help build bridges and bring groups together through collaborative problem solving, USIP administered two dialogue processes.

The first dialogue focused on addressing the problem of violence in schools and culminated in tribal and community leaders coming together to sign the Social Pact against School Violence at a ceremony that took place during a USIP-sponsored International Day of Peace celebration in the city.

This dialogue also resulted in the creation of 52 councils against school violence—two in each of the 26 participating schools. One of the two councils in each school is a General Council, which includes representatives such as tribal elders,

social workers, and municipal council members. The second council is a Mothers' Council, which works with the General Council and with local authorities to contribute to efforts to prevent school violence. This second council provides a platform for women to influence improvements in schools, something which has proven challenging in the past due to the region's gender norms. In addition to advocating for change within local schools, the Mothers' Councils have helped lead efforts to combat COVID-19 in Ubari, including contributing to awareness-raising campaigns and sanitizing schools.

The topic of the second dialogue was the return of markets to the city as key "connectors." Ubari's markets had to move outside the city during the 2014-2016 war, forcing residents to travel dozens of kilometers to buy produce and other goods. During and after this dialogue, Ubarians worked together to help reopen markets, starting with a weekly one that featured 33 vendors representing the three major tribes in 2019. USIP is now partnering with the U.N. World Food Programme to facilitate the return of a daily market and adjoining green space. Like the weekly market, the daily market will benefit the community as a social connector to encourage positive interactions on a larger scale.

NALUT AND SIYAAN

The conflict between residents of **Nalut and Siyaan**, two communities located three hours southwest of Tripoli, is rooted in a land dispute. Although the battle for Tripoli, which began in April 2019, further complicated the relationship between these two communities, USIP succeeded in bringing together representatives of both municipalities in December 2019 to sign an agreement to establish an administrative liaison committee. The signing ceremony marked the first time that the two municipalities have agreed to work together since before the 2011 revolution. In addition to leading efforts to raise awareness of COVID-19 in the region, the committee helped ensure the safe return of Libyans to their homes in the face of COVID-related border and road closures in spring 2020.

PHOTO: After signing a social pact against school violence, residents of the southern Libyan city of Ubari join hands during a USIP-sponsored Peace Day Celebration in September 2019.