International NGOs: Women's Engagement in Community Peacebuilding and Development

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Abstract

This paper discusses the approach of international NGOs' of women's engagement in community peacebuilding in Libya and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. In both countries, women have been subject to various cycle of violence. They remain the most marginalised groups that face domestic and political violence as a serious threat to both their civic engagement and community participation. It also examines the relationship between INGOs and women leaders of NGOs to eliminate the phenomenon of domestic violence against women. The researcher uses a number of tools to collect data and enrich his arguments by interviewing a number of women civil society activists and reviewed the existed literature. The researcher also uses own professional experiences and participatory observation while involved in the leadership of civil society and peacebuilding activities to enrich the debate as well.

Introduction

Social cohesion and active political participation in a pluralistic society are essential components of stabilization and peacebuilding. Cultural diversity and the political participation of various social and political actors including women's engagement enriches social cohesion in accountable and transparent political systems of democratic societies. These societies are also arguably strong enough to withstand new challenges and changes. Divided and undemocratic societies, however, are unable to absorb sudden and shocking challenges like those which occurred in the countries like Palestine and Libya, in particular. Women, however, can contribute to peacebuilding grassroots activities, a form of promotion engagement of citizens who live under violence in the decision-making process and to increase their power to decide on future change or as defined 'participatory democracy' by (Aragones and Sánchez-Pagés, 2009: 56–72).

There have been a number of INGOs in cooperation with local organisations to promote citizens' engagement in the decision-making process and to increase their power. Women's engagement and empowerment has been an important topic for international organisations for several years (Lutz, 2016: 320–341). Women participate actively in popular, and collective public activities to get rid from foreign occupation in Palestine and dictatorship in Libya and would decide on their own future. Women, however, may view their representation as an outcome of empowerment according to the cultural context of their society. This empowerment

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can be understood through the lens of security, transformative change and participation (Porter, 2013: 1-14).

This empowerment, through the lens of security, transformation and participation, can be achieved via the contribution of active non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This power of women's organizations can be a part of the change process, and impact of the network of women's community organizations, and their coordination and cooperation in undertaking effective actions and campaigns, in order to make change a reality in terms of community peacebuilding and development. Women have the power to contribute to the development of their society by participating in non-violent actions, as well as being part of organisations for non-profit activities. Women, Michael Porters writes, have long been distinguished at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts. Their engagement in grassroots peacebuilding is much more visible while men take part in the formal political process. Women's integration into the peace process, therefore, is very important, including the reconstruction and rebuilding process, following the conflict (Potter, 2008: 142-143).

Peacebuilding involves deeply grassroots and personal creative initiatives by ordinary people lived and caught in the conflict context and their voices are seldom heard beyond their communities. Those cases studies of women who lived experiences of grassroots peacebuilding are discussed in this paper. A teacher employed education to increase peacebuilding; a specialist/leader employees active listening and mediation to solve families and social problems and two civil society activists engage in community development and human rights programmes, employing community participatory approach to contribute to grassroots peacebuilding. These stories of women community peacebuilders' challenges and achievements introduce the grassroots approach of civil society peacebuilding rather than formal state institutions. It discusses the active and influential role of women in a bottom up process rather than a top down through formal state institutions (Noma, Aker & Freeman, 2012:7-32).

Women are still neglected and excluded from community development and democratic participation including peacebuilding at the formal institutional processes. Their active, profound contribution and multi-faceted engagement have been largely invisible in peace process even after UNSCR 1325 'usually are informal, and hoc and rarely part of formal peace process, so their stories often drift and unacknowledged' (Porters, 2007:1). Sharing information about their achievements and challenges in peacebuilding at the grassroots, national and international context of conflict are relevant to women social and political empowerment and international community of sustainable peace. Documenting and sharing their stories through well designed platforms at grassroots and international show how they become agents for empowerment, change peace-making and peacebuilding at their own communities. There have been, however, a number of Libyan and Palestinian women who made an exceptional contribution to their society through practices and concept of community peacebuilding and education in particular.

Do internationally sponsored women's peacebuilding programmes alter the ways that women think about their way of life? In this paper, I argue that such programmes have already contributed to contribute to the culture of women's peacebuilding concept and practice to get engaged in development and peacebuilding activities. These programs; however, will make significant headway in changing women attitudes in terms of grassroots and community peacebuilding. The example of women empowerment projects under the funds of western countries in Palestine and Libya is used to clarify these linkages between women's activities in grassroots building via the civil society organisations.

The paper examines the efforts and endeavours of international organisations made to achieve the various objectives of women's community peacebuilding by organising activities of capacity building training, community monitoring and advocacy, research and field studies, awareness, and media outlets. It also assesses the impact that services delivered by INGOs and NGOs have on the attitudes and behaviours of women in relation to community peacebuilding and development. The challenges of violence, however, hinder the progress of women's efforts to contribute to community peacebuilding and development in Palestine and Libya.

Violence Challenge

Violence represents a major challenge for women's integration, advancement and engagement in the development of their societies. These different means of violence cause women to feel a sense of fear and insecurity, guilt, shame, introversion, isolation and loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. Violence also limits women's access to resources, and prevents them from enjoying their rights as human beings. It obstructs their contribution to development and empowerment. Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon in all countries of the world, owing to a range of cultural, educational, environmental and economic factors and causes. The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon describes it as follows: "Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on societies as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned" (UN SG-Ban Ki Moon, 8 March 2007).

The challenges of violence to women's grassroots participatory engagement and their contribution to the development of their society. Women of OPT and Libya have been subject to various cycle of violence under foreign occupation. They have remained the most marginalised groups that face domestic violence as a serious threat to both their civic engagement and community participation. The United Nations have recognised the seriousness of the violence phenomena against women for more than 56 years now. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also introduced further recognition of the violence against women as a hindrance to women's full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UN General Assembly defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (UN General Assembly Resolution 48/104, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993).

Since this recognition, the UN, as well several governments, INGOs and (NGOs) have increased their efforts towards the elimination of violence against women and gender inequality, highlighting a woman's right to be free from violence. There have been many NGOs supported by INGOs technical support and funding that represent a safe place for many victims, marginalised and vulnerable groups including women in many conflict zones of Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine and Iraq where violence is a major challenge to women's social and

political engagement and empowerment. However, women still pay a high price and live in inhuman circumstances, owing to the high level of human rights' violations in many places cross the world. We have seen the images of women who escaped with their children the devastating conflicts in these areas by taking death boats via the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, many women had died at sea and have been lost in the mass grave of the Mediterranean. Many have also remained, however, in their homeland in 'the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing illegal occupation and all of its manifestations' (The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 2016).

INGOs works closely with NGOs have been active in delivering a range of services, aimed at the promotion of women's engagement in 'participatory grassroots' processes despite living in a high level of violence under foreign occupation, poverty and conservatism in the Occupied Territories (OPT) and divisions and civil war in Libya. These NGOs represent various spectrums of social, cultural and political backgrounds that have already delivered a range of actions to eliminate violence against women despite a shifting political landscape. They hope to increase women's resilience and civic engagement via a process of 'participatory grassroots' activities in decision making to help integrate them into the development process of their society. Since the overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011 and the civil war, the country has been deeply divided and the process of state building, peace-making and peace building has become a very complicated matter. Many NGOs have emerged in Libya with assistance of some international donors and organisations from European and the US since the transitional period of 2012. But many Libyans still 'look at these organisations with suspicious eyes, owing to division, lack of transparency and absence of the state' (Tomi, 2017).

INGOs also face a number of challenges including the absence of civil society in Libya, which represents a challenge for peacebuilding in Libya and women's contribution to peacebuilding. INGOs finds cannot work easily Libya, NGOs have no access on the ground that can contribute to grassroots peace building, or that can aid cultural diversity and social cohesion. Most active civil society organisations have already moved to Tunisia, and, owing to Libya's civil war, several human rights activists have been subjected to violence, kidnapping, or even killed like Salwa Bugaighis, an active human rights lawyer who fought against the dictatorship and defended political prisoners who were arrested by the Qaddafi regime. She also played a prominent political role as an organizer of the February 17 Youth Coalition and was a member of Libya's first opposition government in over four decades. Salwa was murdered at home by masked gunmen, moments after voting in the Libyan general election on 26 June, 2014 and no one was brought to justice. This complicated environment has already made women's activists to work and function as Libya remains a country deeply divided and the processes of state building, peace-making and peace building have many obstacles. Islamist groups and nationalist groups disputed, and continue to dispute, over power, oil and the identity of the state. They have not been able to engage in a process that promoted politics as a language of communication to manage their differences and minimise violence. In consequence, the political and geographical division has been deepened both horizontally and vertically (Natil, 2017).

INGOs in cooperation with NGOs aim at increasing awareness and understanding of the severity and prevalence of acts of violence against women. They also try to enhance awareness of community in responses to violence, in order to assist policymakers, and planning and resource allocation. Some NGOs also cooperate with INGOs to identify possible points of intervention by examining factors associated with a heightened risk of violence. They test and employ tools and information that contribute to evaluation efforts of eliminating violence by peacebuilding education.

Peacebuilding Education

There have been some international organisations contributed to women's peacebuilding education and practices. Women, however, are always described as victims and excluded from formal processes, but they are powerful agents for in the contexts of conflict as Hanan Hroub did in promoting practices and concepts of peacebuilding education and practices at her class. Palestinian women employed education to make social and culture changes in society at large. They used education to achieve peace building and advocate non-violence. Education is a significant tool for the Palestinian to struggle peacefully and represent their identity, country and society in the international arena. The Varkey Foundation awarded Hanan Hroub the Global Teacher Prize for her teaching excellence on 14th of March Varkey Foundation is a not-for-profit international 2016. The organisation to improve the standards of education for underprivileged children throughout the world.

Hanan competed against 8,000 international applicants to win the \$1 million prize, presented to her at a UAE ceremony. She grew up in the camp and her family suffered from the violence of occupation when her husband, Omar, and two of her daughters were shot at by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint near Bethlehem. The refugee camp in the Bethlehem city of the occupied West Bank built after the Palestinian Catastrophe in 1948. Her husband, a lawyer was injured in the shoulder and the girls were traumatised. She won the global prize, owing to her philosophy to influence the children in her own classroom as she could not influence the wider environment. She employed a technique of "play and learn" to provide peace, harmony and security for her disruptive students who were often disruptive, unstable and manipulative, some engaged in violent acts themselves, owing to the long foreign occupation. She employed this technique of playing to treat her daughters from trauma as their teachers were not well trained to do so (Natil, 2016).

In addition to Hanan's story of success at the international platforms, there have been tens of women teachers who contribute actively to UNRWA's curriculum in tolerance, human rights and conflict resolution at the grassroots level by educating children at its schools. UNRWA is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which was established on 8 December 1949 to support the Palestinian Refugees. To this day, UNRWA manages schools, rations, and clinic hospitals as it strives to deliver vital services to refugees. In order to assist in social healing, UNRWA also established grassroots centres for young women in twenty-six refugee camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the early 1950s. These centres continue to deliver support to women refugees in the form of activities related to socializing and culture, and they also provide education and recreation services. UNRWA is mandated to provide social, relief, and education services for the thousands of women refugees who have born and brought up in these areas in the period after Oslo Accord was signed in 1993. It delivers operations under the aegis of its 'human development and humanitarian services' (UNRWA 2016).

In 2001, UNRWA introduced its Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance programme (HRCRT) for delivery across all grades and schools in each of UNRWA's five fields of operation in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. UNRWA developed text- books that promote concepts of conflict resolution through school programmes which teach human rights, tolerance, and conflict resolution. HRCRT relies upon international human rights codes including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. and the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which is coordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Pinto 2014: 57-74). Human rights education (HRE) plays a crucial role in establishing the infrastructure needed for a transition to a stable society (Bar-Tal and Rosen, 2009: 564). The implementation of UNRWA's human rights and conflict resolution programme involved the training and hiring of a number of teachers charged with implementing it in the schools where it was to operate.

Despite these strenuous efforts, UNRWA has still drawn criticism from local groups in the Gaza Strip which claim that the programme's coverage of ignoring the Palestinian suffering, however, despite these challenges, some local organisations, NGOs have sought to implement informal grassroots activities of education training peacebuilding including and awareness of community and conflict resolution in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Those organisations have succeeded to work with a number of international organisations and donors to implement community peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities. This was a help to engage young people in community activities that train them in dialogue and peacebuilding. These community activities have been challenged by a number of internal and external circumstances and factors that have included violence, occupation, and divisions between the PA and de facto government of Hamas. For example, Society Voice Foundation (SVF), a Gaza-based NGO led by and serving young, launched activities funded by INGOs to activate and train young women in advocacy, networking, peacebuilding, and dialogue (Natil, 2016: 78-82).

UNRWA has been providing essential technical and financial support to these centres to sustain them despite frequent reductions in the forms of assistance they receive. UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. Foreign aid remains a very essential for programmes' implementation. UNRWA and NGOs cannot implement its programs or operations without international aid and assistance. Not only the foreign aid is essential for programmes implementation, but also its effectiveness and impact on women's political participations has been essential for donors as well (Lutz, 2016: 320–341).

Participatory Approach

INGOs focus in particular on programmes which has been introduced in the form of participatory approach which looks to raise awareness of women and equip them 'with an understanding of their place in the world and a common set of key values, including women's empowerment and gender equality,' while also 'helping them develop the skills to thrive as adults in an evolving, challenging landscape' (UNRWA, 2016b). The mutual interests of INGOs and the major donor of the programme, for example, the Norwegian government is to empower women's leadership and fighting poverty among women's who compose the majority of the young population. These sorts of NGO initiatives provide young women with a platform which allows them to participate in their local communities and deliver outcomes at a variety of levels.

Local NGOs have implemented various actions to target and educate a large number of young people on the values of democracy, human rights, and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, some local NGOs are trying to engage young women via a holistic approach which combines discussions and dialogue, coalition-building, inter- views, and various interactions between the young people themselves and other stakeholders. These select initiatives are informed by need-based design processes, and so they are responsive to the broader political changes taking place around them and able to adapt to the specific requirements of the younger elements within the population. Women have been practically misused by the politicians to achieve very narrow political interests regardless of good governance practices, active grassroots engagement and community participation. Women have no real influences over the public policies and record a very low level of civic participation. Women who call for change, improving human rights, democracy and peace building would face a number of social and political threats. They are banned from freedom of expression, media freedom, the right of associations, and the right to organize peaceful actions and marches (Siam 2016).

There have been, however, a number of women who challenge the social and cultural context and ignored the society criticism and cynicism and involved in third party intervention, an alternative dispute system. These initiatives transform conflict through methodologies of education and training, and they seek to empower young people by engaging them in community participation actions. Some NGOs use education to promote reconciliation and dialogue within the community between various competing Palestinian groups. Women involvement in community activities is a core principle of conflict resolution approaches which also promote dialogue and other peacebuilding mechanisms and tools. These activities of NGOs also enhanced women's participatory approach to get engaged or respond to emergencies occur from time to time in the society. Local NGOs have already implemented in cooperation with INGOs hundreds of civil society projects, programmes, and actions to protect women from violence and encourage women to contribute to an equitable, open and democratic society through raising public awareness of development issues and promoting education for development, and to mobilize greater support for actions against poverty. These NGOs operations contribute to women's defiance, resilience and public freedoms, for example, the Society Voice Foundation's project "Empowerment of Women's Civic Engagement and Public

Freedoms" funded by a German based organisation, Women's Prayers Committee. (Amer, 2016).

NGOs also contributed to increase number of women's leaders who contributed to their society and achieved a number of successful stories in different fields. Their contributions have already made a huge difference in that they encourage much more women's 'participation' in the development of their society living under the longest occupation in contemporary history. Mrs. Haneen Rizk Al Samak and Mrs. Fida Amer show high skills of challenge, resilience, local leadership and empowerment and contributed to their local community by conducting various community activities. Haneen a mother of four children visited displaced families and led local research and advocacy work in order to report the challenges facing the reconstruction process. Haneen attempted to visit most of the women and their families who lost their homes during the war 2014 (Rizk Al Samak, 2016). Fida also led various Society Voice Foundation (SVF) projects and programmes including a local project, in partnership with the Human Rights and IHL Secretariat to raise the voices of victims who lost their homes during the 2014 war. Fida is a mother of six children, but spends eight hours daily on the project. Her project aimed at working with displaced families and understanding their issues. Active listening to displaced women is a crucial point of understanding their needs and voices (Amer, 2016).

These activities could provide a real indication of changes occurring in the lives of group young women leaders who are empowered in the techniques of leadership capacity with emphasis on freedom of expression, community voluntary work and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has been living in very severe circumstances and a lack of human security at different levels, owing to the absence of peace process, economic development and the Palestinian division. Palestinian women, during this period, therefore, have witnessed unprecedented state of poor public freedoms, socio-political deadlock at all levels, owing to the paralyzed political system, social and geographic division and the hardship of a poor economic life (Almour 2016).

Local Criticism

There have been, however, a number of women activists who believe that foreign international NGOs or and funding contributed to promote the concept of women's community participation, but it still has a negative impact on civil society programmes and capacity building (Samak, 2016). Some donors have special agendas and conditions on specific community activities and do not support certain women's organisations, that sympathized with certain political groups; however, there are some donors who have no political or conditional agendas. Foreign aid also made limited contributions to women's political participation because the projects' funding, target groups and duration were limited. These projects, however, contributed to raise women's awareness of issues of elections such as laws, campaign management, advocacy, and building alliances between various political and social groups of mutual interest (Siam, 2016).

INGOs including foreign aid also plays a role in weakening the Women's Movement and its leaders, despite the fact of promoting the concepts and values of women's social and political participation. Women CSOs responds to INGOs calls to tackle issues, which are not priority as gender awareness. Gender awareness has not been a Palestinian priority as it imported from donors' community and CSOs responded to the call of proposals, launched by donors. It also redirected the priorities of women according to the donors' agenda and women's organisations wasted time and resources in seeking funding to keep its own existence rather than focusing on women's needs and urgent issues. as journalists, Mrs. Tagreed Almour states, "Foreign aid and its agenda affected negatively women movement because it is not sustainable despite the importance impact on women's political and social participation" (Almour 2016).

These concepts enlighten and raise women's awareness of modern issues of participating in social and empowerment organising themselves and political activities; however, these women's organisations have been unable to influence marginalised women and introduce a positive change (Al Samak, 2016). NGOs have limited capacity to challenge and contribute to the policymaking processes that could tackle poverty alleviation and civil society empowerment, and this is because they face an unstable political environment and funding crises. In addition to these challenges facing NGOs in the field of women's empowerment, major international NGOs (INGOs) often control and monopolize resources. For example, both local and international NGOs often submit applications in response to the same funding calls made by major international donors such as the European Union (EU), the International Development (USAID), United States Agency for and other governments and agencies (Natil, 2016).

INGOs often prove more successful than their local counterparts in bids to secure funding because they can draw on advanced technical capacities and expertise as well as significant established networks of contacts to win over donors. Similarly, it is easier for INGOs to acquire funding for its programmes and overheads from donor governments than it is for local NGOs to achieve the same results. As a result, many INGOs work directly with the beneficiaries of aid and avoid direct partnership with local NGOs, and highly trained staff are recruited from outside the region. This situation weakens the capacity of local NGOs which, when they are involved at all, are treated as subcontractors rather than as partners (Murad 2014).

These challenges influence the sustainability of NGOs; they also affect their ability to provide rapid responses to women's need in general and to cater for women's social and political participation empowerment in particular. This drop down of foreign aid to women NGOs have already affected women's scope of works and their abilities to influence the political structure and landscape. Many donors, however, who pledged to support the process of rebuilding the Gaza Strip at the Cairo conference of October 2015, have already failed to channel funds to do so. Delay of foreign aid also affected women's humanitarian circumstances who have been waiting to rebuild their houses since 2014. Women's NGOs could not take a role in the reconstruction process of the Gaza Strip after the destructive war of 2014, despite the fact that the process was controlled by few officials without the real participation of men and women (Siam, 2016).

Major INGOs continue to produce limited impact and incur high operational expenses. In its entirety, internationally funding women work forms an integral part of the local context and contributes to the delivery of important developmental and nation-building agendas. It is crucial that local communities endorse women empowerment programming that is designed to help young women to better understand their rights. It is also important that internationally funded projects do not ignore the conflict's historical and political context and contribution of women to the Palestinian cause. It is hoped that these programmes will provoke the transformation of young women into peacebuilders and advocates for human rights both before and after any comprehensive peace agreement prevails. There are substantial grounds for optimism, but funded work with young women will continue to have very limited impact on the peace and development agenda for as long as the occupation and division maintain a status quo that is characterized by violence and fragmentation.

Conclusion

However, despite these challenges, some international donors have sought to promote conflict resolution by providing very limited funding to local NGOs. They have been helped to engage young people in community activities that train them in dialogue and peacebuilding. A very limited number of NGOs have succeeded in securing small-scale funds for their conflict transformation activities. These donordriven activities have been challenged by a number of internal and external circumstances and factors that have included violence, occupation, and divisions.

The international community must, therefore, renew its efforts to increase support for women's peacebuilding in Palestine and Libya. The international community must exert significant influence over decision making policy to work creatively to achieve justice and establish human rights which include respect the rights of women and their movement according to international law. Within the oPt and Libya, international donors must prioritize women empowerment that is centred on social and economic development community. In their funding of such initiatives, they should also address the shortage of funding provided to local NGOs that work with women.

Whoever makes and builds the peace in Libya needs to solve the horizontal and vertical political and geographical division in the country. New leaders should accept the participation of all Libyans in the reconciliation and peace building process, which includes elimination of the Political Isolation Act enforced by the transitional council governing Libya after the fall of Gaddafi's rule in 2011. This Act did not allow for statesmen of Gaddafi's rule to become engaged in the new political life and to build the new Libya.

Gaddafi's officers were not only a few in number, but there were also hundreds of them with very close tribal connections to the societal ranks of Libya. This created a tense relationship between the former regime's loyalists and "new leaders of Libya". This law has already deepened division and led to a to severe political crisis and violence over interests and power. Conflict of interest and power have been galvanised by political differences and religious ideology, as well as by conflict over oil. As such, a future peace also needs consider a just distribution of resources to benefit all Libyans. Today, Libyan fighting groups are in dispute over oil installations. They seek power and the financial benefits of the state despite the peace deal backed by the United Nations in December 2015. Libya is a country with very rich oil deposits, but its people have been poor and marginalised because the resources are controlled by warlords. The unjust distribution of resources for more than 45 year has had a serious impact on the division of Libya. Future plans should consider resources allocation and benefits for all social and political spectrums in order to encourage their engagement in rebuilding Libya.

The Libyan Government supported by the UN should tailor a national peace building plan to bring all social, cultural and political spectrums together to work to resolve all of their accumulated issues and conflicts in Libya. Rebuilding a modern state in Libya requires placing Libya under the UN for a transitional period similar to what happened, for example, in East Timor. This plan must be endorsed by elected body or the Libyan House of Representatives. This step will encourage and empower the Libyan civil society organisations – civil society organisations, based in Tunisia to move back to the Libyan soil and contribute to future peace. Libyan civil society organisations should take a leading role in implementing this plan, supported by national, regional and international actors, to contribute towards building a trust between social and political groups.

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