

Today was the day! Sunday 14th February 2016 when IFI (International Forgiveness Institute Lebanon) in cooperation with YWAM (Youth with a Mission) created the first bridge building event for Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian youth in Lebanon. This is the same youth that we as IFI have worked with for the past 4 months to educate on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution through the forgiveness based curriculum. With the help of a small group of International volunteers from France and around 30 youth from Lebanon we spent an unforgettable day at the beach with loads of fun activities, overcoming hostility and breaking down barriers of sectarian division in Lebanon.



But why is peacemaking and bridge building so important?

Lebanon has been severely damaged as a result of persistent sectarian conflict at a political and socioreligious level. Unfortunately, these past experiences still have a huge influence on Lebanese society, with dehumanizing perceptions being passed on to the youth. This is largely due to the fact that there has been no means of official acknowledgement in dealing with the causes of conflict in Lebanon, and the hurt that it has left in its wake. The current situation with over 1.5 million Syrian refugees entering Lebanon has dramatically increased tensions between opposing people groups. Bridge building and peacemaking is necessary in order to help prevent further conflict from breaking out in Lebanon





Therefore we are very pleased to say that our first bridge building event was a huge success.

When the groups had arrived we started with a selection of team building games in order for them to get to know each other better. For some of the youth this was the first time they have done such activities at the beach but after a

while insecurities were overcome and everyone enjoyed themselves. It was great to see these young people from all different backgrounds running to grab wood for the fire.

The highlight of the day was a Sketch performed by the YWAM team that transformed the parable of the good Samaritan into a modern version related to surfing. Everybody had so much fun watching how Eric, one of the Surfers, got beaten up by his surfer mates and eventually received help from some of our Palestinian youth.

Afterwards Roula shared about her experiences in the Civil war, how she hated Syrians and Palestinian for what they did to her country and family and how she eventually learned to love these people and see them as humans with common needs, like each one of us. Everybody was listening very closely because this is exactly what most of the youth and their families have experienced in the past and are still experiencing today due to instability in the country.

This amazing day ended with food (of course!), Arabic dancing and some surfing lessons.

It was incredible how good the atmosphere was among the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese youth, even though all of them have experienced severe hurt and pain at the hand of the other.



The leader of the Palestinian Youth group was so thrilled about this remarkable day and expressed his thankfulness, since even he has never experienced something quite like it and encouraged us to continue with our work.



Not only him but even onlookers passing by the beach that day were astonished by what was happening in front of their eyes.

This was definitely 'the best day ever' as one of the Palestinian girls stated on facebook. Hopefully there will be many more to come.



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