



SUCCESS STORY

Conservation Project Unites Neighboring Villages



OTI/Lebanon

The Kfar Zabad Site Support Group leads a hiking activity through the wetland that is uniting neighboring villages.

“We have really achieved something – initiating the interaction between the groups. There is a sense of natural drive and a newly developed enthusiasm to work together.”

**— Bassima Khatib,
SPNL Director**

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August 2008 – Two villages are overcoming religious and political differences through a project designed to mitigate conflict by preserving an environmentally significant wetland in the Beqaa Valley.

The endangered habitat lies on the main migration route for African-Eurasian water birds and spans the Armenian Christian village of Anjar and the mixed Christian-Muslim village of Kfar Zabad.

A local nongovernmental organization, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), is heading the project which encourages residents from both villages to work together to preserve the wetland. In turn, the project is helping to bridge the gaps between the communities and diffuse tensions exacerbated by a polarized political climate.

After successfully setting up a site support group in each village to lead eco-tourism activities and monitor and safeguard the wetland, SPNL organized a conflict resolution workshop to further strengthen the bond between the participants.

Zaher Ballout, a trainer from The Lebanese Conflict Resolution Network, witnessed significant changes during the workshop. “When we started,” he said, “there was a big ice [block] between the two groups. At the end of the first day we were able to crack the ice, and today is great – the ice has started to melt.”

Participant Zepure Tumberian, 28, from Anjar explained, “This workshop will not only allow us to help nature but also allow us to help ourselves.”

Echoing the sentiments, 17-year-old Amani Katib from Kfar Zabad said, “This [activity] has reinforced trust between [the participants] and will help us work together now and later as visitors from outside villages come to the wetlands.”

As the October bird migration steadily approaches, the two youth-led committees are working to establish an outdoor activity area and organize a community wetland festival.