



SUCCESS STORY

Enough of Hiding in Bathrooms: 600 Toilets Make a Dramatic Point



OTI/Lebanon

A former combatant publicly apologizes for his role in forcing people to seek shelter in their bathrooms during Lebanon's civil war. It is estimated that the war claimed more than 100,000 lives.

"I hid my newborn niece in the toilet to escape the bombs... I don't want my niece, who is now a young woman with a child of her own, to have to hide in the bathroom with her baby as we did."

—Testimonial at the April 13 opening ceremony of Nada Sehnaoui's exhibit

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April 2008 – "Haven't 15 years of hiding in the toilets been enough?" This was the question posed by a public exhibition of 600 toilets to commemorate the Lebanese civil war at a time when deep divisions have raised fears of renewed conflict.

The two-week exhibit by Lebanese artist Nada Sehnaoui served as a stark reminder of the dangers posed by the political stalemate and increasingly polarized rhetoric. "From 1975 to 1990, the Lebanese people used to hide from the bombings in their toilets, where there were no glass windows," said Sehnaoui. "Now, we hear war drums and we may be killing each other again. This is why I am raising the question: have we not had enough?"

With support from OTI, Sehnaoui teamed with the Lebanese Association for Human Rights to organize a series of activities, including concerts, film showings, and open discussions, at an outdoor site in central Beirut – all with the overarching theme of preventing an escalation of the current crisis.

Among the most moving moments during the dialogues were spontaneous testimonials from audience members who had lived through the war. The first-person accounts provided a "healing experience," according to one participant. And a former combatant said, "I was one of those responsible for people hiding in their bathrooms, and for this, I am sorry."

A teenager who had learned about the war through the stories told by her parents voiced her commitment to "making sure it doesn't happen again." This sentiment was echoed by youth activists who took to the stage to read a poem emphasizing national solidarity.

The discussions initiated at the site continued in the press, as the events received extensive media coverage. Likening the rows and rows of toilets to a cemetery, several articles said the exhibit reminded visitors of the brutality of war and triggered collective memories of a painful chapter in Lebanon's history.

Although Sehnaoui deliberately chose an unconventional way to deliver her message, she said, "wars are more shocking than toilets."