

Community Confidence Building Mitigates Conflict in Macedonia

Skopje—“I hope for peace. I am occupied with that thought all the time. I don’t want to hear every day that people are dying from hunger and war,” said a woman from one of the most conflict-affected areas in western Macedonia. She speaks for a majority of people who hope for a peaceful and productive future. USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) helped the woman establish a multi-ethnic community center, enabling elderly neighbors to spend time together as they did prior to the armed conflict of last year. The center serves not only as a gathering place for the elderly of Tetevo, but also as an example of tolerance and diversity to the broader community. OTI fosters such examples of hope to help prevent a resurgence of the violence that brought the country to the brink of war only a year ago.

OTI’s Macedonia Confidence Building Initiative (CBI) began in October 2001, as part of a larger U.S. government response to help prevent Macedonia from becoming the next Balkan state to erupt into ethnic violence and to support its pursuit of much-needed political reforms.

Evidence indicates that CBI is having the intended impact by increasing citizen participation in addressing community concerns.



CBI supported a local government’s efforts to remove hate graffiti on a storefront destroyed in last year’s rioting in southern Macedonia.

The program helps to create a supportive environment for the implementation of a peace settlement brokered by the United States and the European Union in August 2001. Constitutional changes to ensure equal rights for the diverse ethnic and religious communities, as mandated by the Framework Agreement, have been made. CBI is working to increase support for those changes.



Women participate in a CBI-sponsored community meeting in an Albanian village in western Macedonia.

A school counselor from eastern Macedonia, who worked with CBI to rehabilitate a local school, said CBI’s assistance “is like the Chinese proverb that says, if you want to eat an apple in 10 years, you must plant a tree today.” CBI community initiatives include strengthening the capacity, responsiveness and

accountability of local governments, and increasing availability and access to balanced information and diverse perspectives.

“We are creating physical spaces where people can mix freely. We are also creating social spaces, or opportunities, for people to meet and exchange ideas and work together toward common goals,” said a program officer from the International Organization for Migration, CBI’s implementing partner.

The physical spaces are parks and recreational facilities. Social spaces encompass activities, such as installing village water systems and roads, distributing multi-lingual newspapers and conducting democratic leadership camps where Macedonian youth make up teams to run mock municipalities.

An important indicator of CBI’s success is the satisfaction expressed by communities involved. “For me, the thing that means the most is the model itself,” said an environmentalist from northern Macedonia. “It is clear that, with a common effort and a little bit of help, people can achieve a great deal for themselves.”

CBI also measures success in terms of concrete community contributions to confidence-building projects. Participating residents, civil society groups and municipalities have all demonstrated their commitment to creating an environment for cooperation, tolerance and peace in Macedonia by providing nearly 100 percent matching contributions—both cash and in-kind—to CBI’s grants. CBI’s investment to date is \$6.9 million.

CBI’s success is likewise manifested at a national level. The program has contributed substantially to U.S. government efforts to help Macedonia strengthen its democracy. CBI contributed to free and fair elections in September and to the successful conduct of a national census in November.

CBI celebrated its first year of accomplishments and partnerships with communities and civic groups across the country and rewarded its outstanding staff and grantees at an event in Skopje on December 4, 2002. In typical CBI fashion, the event brought together diverse groups of people to share ideas and experience.

On the occasion, U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Butler and Macedonia’s minister of the environment, who partnered with CBI while he was the mayor of one municipality in northeastern Macedonia, praised grantees for their efforts and for serving as positive role models for others around the country.

The event was the culmination of a year’s worth of confidence-building activities that unleashed peaceful, democratic and productive potential in every community that CBI supported. Over the course of the year, OTI supported more than 300 confidence-building measures in 77 of Macedonia’s most vulnerable municipalities. The event also served to launch the second year of CBI’s assistance, during which CBI aims to strengthen local self-governance, a cornerstone of the peace agreement.



Ambassador Lawrence Butler helps a community rehabilitate a school in northeastern Macedonia.