

“Badna Naaref” website goes live: A diary of the war is now open for the public

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), Université Saint Joseph (Unité Mémoire du Centre d’Etudes du Monde Arabe Moderne), and UMAM Documentation and Research launched on Saturday 10 March the website www.badnanaaref.org at The Hangar (UMAM D&R). Badna Naaref is part of a wider pilot project funded by the European Union and the Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon.

Representative of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon Maria Sanchez, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon Boris Richard, Education Ministry representative Joseph Youssef, who is also president of the Committee of Education and member of the Center for Educational Research and Development attended the launching event, as did several religious figures.

The website documents more than 100 summaries of recorded interviews conducted by student participants from twelve public and private schools from greater Beirut with people from their surrounding communities who were youth during the war in Lebanon from 1975 until 1990. These testimonies focus on daily life during the war, people’s survival, and their suffering.

The website also offers an overview of the training sessions conducted with the students and instructors involved, and a general profile of the participants, schools and teachers. It is developed as an interactive resource, and will be built on with time.

The project was implemented over the course of a year and aims at developing awareness among the young generation about the negative repercussions of political violence.

At the start of the event, Head of Lebanon Programme at the International Center for Transitional Justice Carmen Abou Jaoudé presented the project highlighting its objectives and thanked all participants.

“This is a pilot project and if it yields to positive results among students, other schools can implement it and expand it to other regions. Students can also tell their experience to others, Abou Jaoudé concluded,” she said. She added "This oral history project created a rare and valuable archive which will be put at the disposal of the wider public and will be available for schools to use as they see fit within their own curricula".

Ms Maria Sanchez said the EU was pleased to fund the project adding that ignoring the past results in committing the same mistakes in the future. “The project is a new step in the right direction toward initiating a dialogue to know what happened in the past and try to avoid the same mistakes in the future,” she said. “We at the EU have had our civil wars and conflicts, and dialogue between generations was crucial and this dialogue should include everybody regardless of the affiliations,” she said.

Boris Richard said that transitional justice and addressing the past are among his embassy’s priorities and pointed out to the importance of this type of work in Lebanon. He also commended the role of civil society in Lebanon. Richard highlighted the importance of dialogue, and cited the website as a concrete result.

Joseph Youssef in turn said that the memory of the war is crucial to building the future. He also called for learning lessons from the war and invited everyone to visit the website and read the summaries of the interviews conducted by the students.

Speaking on behalf of the teachers who supervised the students’ work. Olga Farhat said that the importance of “Badna Naaref” is its focus on the humanitarian aspect of the daily life in times of war which relates to all Lebanese from different sects, regions, and political affiliations rather than the political and military aspects. “The project is an opportunity for today’s generations to discover their parents’ and relatives’ lives during this period of our modern history,” she said. Farhat added that the students had the desire and determination to uncover that phase and they had many questions especially about a unified history book and why that phase of Lebanon’s history is disregarded in their history courses.

Two students then presented their experiences of the oral history project.

Lokman Slim, director of UMAM (D&R), explained the website’s content noting that launching the website coincided with the recent heated debate on the history book which puts the project at the heart of the developments.

Carol Mansour is working on a documentary about the project and excerpts of it were played during the event. This documentary will be disseminated in schools to be used as an educational tool.

ICTJ, Université Saint Joseph (Unité Mémoire du Centre d’Etudes du Monde Arabe Moderne), and UMAM Documentation and Research have jointly worked on the development of the website www.badnanaaref.org in the framework of the project “Talking Between Generations: A Wartime Diary” since February 2011 with consultation with the Ministry of Education. This comes as part of the EU-funded project “Lebanon’s unaddressed legacy: the missing and the families’ right to know.”