

PEACE SISTERS



DUHOK, KURDISTAN

2021



IMPLEMENTED BY THE LOTUS FLOWER
WWW.THELOTUSFLOWER.ORG



Project Timeframe: April 2021 - December 2021

Project Location:

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The Lotus Flower would like to thank Germany's Federal Foreign Office for supporting us to deliver this extremely valuable inaugural project for female peacemakers. Because of their support, we have been able to train and support women-led initiatives to foster peace within their communities.



Federal Foreign Office



Human Rights

Table of Key Acronyms

TLF	The Lotus Flower
IDP	Internally-displaced people
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
GBV / SGBV	Gender-based violence / sexual and gender-based violence



INTRODUCTION

Decades of conflict have played a significant role in the chronic underrepresentation of women in the peacebuilding and constitutional processes in Iraq. Women have been demoted to the periphery of society, with little to no influence in social, economic, and political institutions.

The ISIS conflict of 2014 exacerbated these issues as displaced Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims arrived en masse in Kurdistan, and the long-lasting effects of persecution and trauma plus the strain on limited resources means that the area remains a potential hotbed for sectarian beliefs and attitudes. Women in particular have been impacted by this volatile situation. With few resources available to them, many are unsure of their basic human rights, and in camps and across the wider community, they are still liable to experience gender-based violence, harassment, and assault.

Long-term suppression means they have little idea about how to break free of such harmful cycles, and years of war and displacement have broken relationships and trust within communities, and between families and individuals. Women typically require permission to engage in activities outside the home, and their roles in peacebuilding, reconciliation, mediation and democracy are accordingly extremely limited.

Our Peace Sisters project provides initiatives to foster peacebuilding and social coexistence, as well as empowering women and girls to recognize their human rights and take leadership roles, specifically as community mediators. This method of rebuilding is as vital as the reconstruction of buildings and cities. As high-level discussions on closing camps and IDPs returning to their homes, it is necessary to begin the conflict resolution and reconciliation process between ethnic and religious groups. IDP and refugee camps are not a long-term solution to the humanitarian crisis caused by violent conflict and Peace Sisters work so people can trust their neighbors again and continue the healing process.

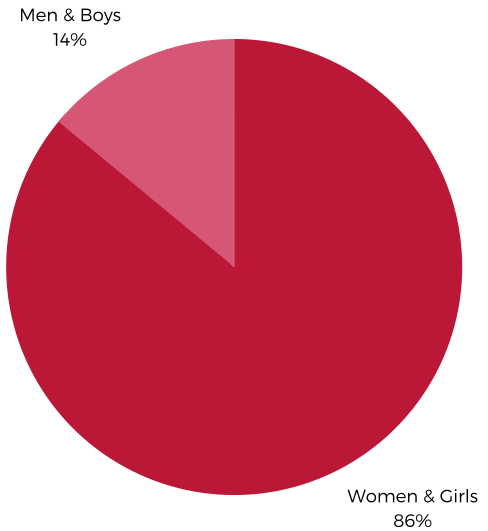
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Peace Sisters promotes and supports women's voices and their active participation in the process of peacebuilding and conflict resolution in their communities. Aligned with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, this program facilitates the implementation of the global resolution at the grassroots level to ensure that women and girls have the training, skills, and confidence to be peacemakers.

Project activities include:

- Mediation Training with a customized curriculum designed by the University of Duhok
- Soft Skills Training
- Community Workshops, led by female mediators, to promote social cohesion & inclusivity between refugee, IDP, and host communities as well as religious leaders and NGO representatives.
- Women-led peacebuilding initiatives in each of the 3 communities.

Total Participants: 1,843 Individuals



Total Impact by Activity:

Mediation & Soft Skills Training for core Peace Sisters	55 women & girls
Mediation Training Phase II	82 women & girls
Community Workshops	31 participants (co-ed)
10 Community-led Initiatives	1,675 participants (co-ed)



PROJECT TIMELINE

DATE	LOCATION	ACTIVITY
APRIL 2021 PROJECT LAUNCH	DUHOK ESSYAN CAMP (IDP) RWANGA CAMP (IDP) DOMIZ 2 CAMP (REFUGEE)	APPLICATIONS FORMS WERE RELEASED FOR MEDIATION TRAINING MEDIATION TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT)
MAY-JULY 2021 EDUCATION	DUHOK	MEDIATION TRAINING FOR 50 PEACE SISTERS SOFT SKILLS TRAINING
AUG-SEPT 2021 COLLABORATION	DUHOK ESSYAN CAMP (IDP) RWANGA CAMP (IDP) DOMIZ 2 CAMP (REFUGEE)	COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS COMMUNITY MEDIATION TRAINING ASSESSMENT FOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES
OCT - DEC 2021 ACTION	DUHOK BA'ADRE ESSYAN CAMP (IDP) RWANGA CAMP (IDP) DOMIZ 2 CAMP (REFUGEE)	IMPLEMENTATION OF 10 COMMUNITY-LED PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES AS DESIGNED BY OUR PEACE SISTERS
DECEMBER 2021 CELEBRATION	DUHOK	CLOSING CEREMONY



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Peace Sisters' main outputs focus on upskilling and increasing the capacity of women and girls to be mediators through targeted training to enable them to actively participate in the process of peacebuilding within their communities.

The program also increases individuals' knowledge on women's rights as human rights, awareness on gender perception, and understanding equality. To achieve this, our Peace Sisters led community activities that also targeted men and boys. We believe that increasing women's rights and their role in the peacebuilding process produces a positive impact to the lives of not only women and girls but men and boys too.

April 2021

The Lotus Flower (TLF) distributed the applications for mediation training online and inside the camps and Duhok City. In the end, over 200 women and girls applied and the majority resided in IDP and refugee camps in Duhok Governorate.

At the end of the month, the University of Duhok provided the initial Training of Trainers (ToT) in mediation for 5 TLF volunteers and staff members, equipping them with the skills to teach women and girls the same program within their communities. During the 6 days of intensive training, topics covered included theories of conflict, violence and peace as well as the differences between negotiation, arbitration, and mediation. The group covered principles and methods of negotiation and mediation, culminating in debates, conflict simulations, and role play to put their new skills into practice. Sven Krauspe, Acting CG of the German Consulate, gave an opening speech.

May 2021

TLF volunteers conducted mediation training for 50 women and girls from the IDP, refugee, and host communities. The 50 women were selected among 200 applicants to become Peace Sisters, and they represent a diverse ethnic and religious background and nationalities. The training covered a range of topics on mediation, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and peace negotiations and theories. The Peace Sisters also received training on UNSCR 1325 and the importance of its implementation in Iraq for the purpose of strengthening and supporting the important role that women should play in the process of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarian response, and reconstruction of their communities.



Kathrin Jaschke, a representative from the German Consulate in Erbil and is responsible for politics, humanitarian affairs, and human rights, joined the training to support the participants.

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Germany & the Consulate General are very happy and proud to support the Peace Sisters project. The main goals of the project are that you, as Peace Sisters, will become key drivers of peacebuilding negotiations, rebuild your communities, and lead mediation within the community. You will take on leadership roles and practice critical thinking, teamwork, communications, and public speaking. - Kathrin Jaschke

”

June - July 2021

TLF conducted 5 soft skills training sessions on teamwork, communication skills, public speaking, leadership, and critical thinking for the 50 Peace Sisters.

Vian Ahmed, TLF's Country Director, accompanied 5 Peace Sisters from different communities to visit the German Consulate in Erbil. They discussed challenges, gaps, and recommendations in the implementation of Peace Sisters. The meeting enabled all participants to exchange opinions, share experiences, provide feedback, and ask questions with Sven Krauspe.

August - September 2021

The Peace Sisters held community consultation workshops with different leaders and representatives from NGOs, government institutions, community leaders, and activists in Duhok, Essyan, Rwanga, and Domiz 2 camps. The workshops focused on community problems and service gaps faced by women and girls in the community and collaborative brainstorming to develop solutions. They also discussed important interventions that would increase participation of women in all spheres of life and empower them within vulnerable communities.

The Peace Sisters residing in Domiz 2 refugee camp received a visit from the Consul General of Germany, Mr. Klemens Semtner, to discuss specific issues currently faced by the refugee community.

During September, the Peace Sisters conducted mediation training for other women and girls in their communities. Each training targeted 20 women in 4 locations.



September - December 2021

Following the community consultation workshops, the Peace Sisters developed 10 initiatives that were then implemented in their local community to support women and girls and improve their participation in society.

The initiatives reached 1,675 individuals and included the following campaigns:

1. International Peace Day: The Peace Sisters conducted community integration activities in Rwanga camp for Yazidi and Muslim youth. The youth participated in an awareness seminar on the importance of coexistence and tolerance between different communities so they can live in peace. At the end of the activity, the participants wrote peace messages and gave them to people in the camp to show love, tolerance, and respect.

The Peace Sisters also visited religious sites within Duhok governorate to learn from religious leaders about Islam, Christianity, and Yazidism. They shared the importance of encouraging peace and tolerance while also concentrating on the messages of each religion to promote peace and social cohesion. The Peace Sisters enjoyed their discussions with the Mullah, Priest, and Sheikh and learned about the historical sites of Lalish and other Muslim and Christian places in Duhok governorate.

2. UNSCR 1325 Awareness Campaign: During the anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the Peace Sisters implemented an awareness campaign about the resolution and the importance of its implementation in 3 camp locations: Essyan, Rwanga, and Domiz 2 over the course of 10 days. The campaign targeted women and girls as well as men and boys.

3. Field visit to the University of Duhok: 10 Peace Sisters met with the department of Peace & Human Rights and the Institute of Psychotherapy and Psych Traumatology. They learned about how the systems works in both departments, what subjects they study, and how each of these departments is directly related to our Peace Sisters project and its objectives. The group included Peace Sisters from the IDP, refugee, and host communities and for many, it was their first experience with an academic institution in Duhok.

4. Literacy course: A Peace Sister in Essyan Camp implemented a literacy course for 12 illiterate women from Ba'adre district for 3 months to ensure that these women learn the basic skills needed to read and write. She believes that education, regardless of age and socio-economic status, is the foundation for women's participation in the peacebuilding process.



5. Awareness Campaign on Special Needs & Disabilities: 6 Peace Sisters designed and implemented an awareness campaign on topics related to those with special needs and disabilities in Essyan, Rwanga, and Domiz 2 camps. A peaceful society requires inclusivity of all its residents and understanding of differences is developed through education and safe spaces. The Peace Sisters reached 560 beneficiaries of all genders and age groups. Our staff psychologist also provided mental health sessions to families of special needs people to support them and consult on better treatment of people with special needs.

6. Self Defense: During November's annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, Peace Sisters facilitated self-defense training in Rwanga camp and Duhok for women and girls. Self-defense teaches women and girls how to protect themselves from different forms of physical harassment and increase their confidence. The training had a positive impact and encouraged more women to learn how to defend themselves. Since this introductory course, we have received many requests to continue this activity.

7. Self-Development Workshops: Self-confidence and decision-making workshops were held in all 4 locations and reach 50 women and girls. The Peace Sisters decided to implement these workshops after their consultations with their communities.

8. Journalism in Peacebuilding: The Peace Sisters conducted a 5-day course in Essyan and Duhok on journalism and the importance of social media in promoting peace in collaboration with an experienced trainer. ISIS divided local populations through its violent attacks and hateful propaganda via its online messaging. The training aims to counter these destructive narratives by providing female citizen journalists with professional skills in communication via a variety of outlets, including writing and social media.

9. GBV Training for Men & Boys: Peace Sisters held awareness sessions on gender-based violence for 25 young men and boys in Duhok and Essyan to complement 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an international campaign sponsored by the UN. Men and boys must take an active role in mitigating GBV and promoting women's rights in their community.

10. Peace at the Table: In late December, the Peace Sisters hosted a closing ceremony to celebrate all participants and supporting partners, including the German Federal Foreign Office. The ceremony featured a photography exhibition by TLF's Storytelling Sisters, live music, and "Peace at the Table" meal. The event enabled the Peace Sisters from different communities to spend time together, share their experience, and showcase their traditional clothing to amplify peace, harmony, and coexistence.



PROJECT IMPACT

A bespoke monitoring and evaluation plan was designed and implemented for this project. Key informant interviews were utilized throughout the process to help us determine what is working effectively and identify areas that needed adjustment to increase program quality and impact.

Our M&E Officer conducted pre- and post- training surveys for mediation training and soft skills training. Upon completion of the community initiatives, attendees had the opportunity to provide feedback so we could measure quality and impact.

The whole process was conducted by the M&E Officer and Project Manager and overseen by the Country Director and International Program Manager.

— “
I wanted to be a Peace Sister because I want to be an effective member of the community and help people around me. I also wanted to be with people from different background and religions.
” —

MEET NAJWA

I am a 23-year-old nursing student from Sinjar and currently live in Rwanga camp. Living in the camp can be hard, but spending time learning new skills and taking courses can make it easier.

During my time with the Peace Sisters training, I have learned a lot. I loved everything about it, especially that everyone can freely express their opinion and accept each other.

I want to use the skills I acquired to help my family and community. With this project, I hope to be useful with my skills and end conflicts in my area.



IMPACT: MEDIATION

What motivated you to participate in mediation training?

Participants stated that they wanted to learn more about the mediation process so they could help their community solve problems collaboratively and learn better decision-making skills. Other motivations included meeting new people and building friendships.

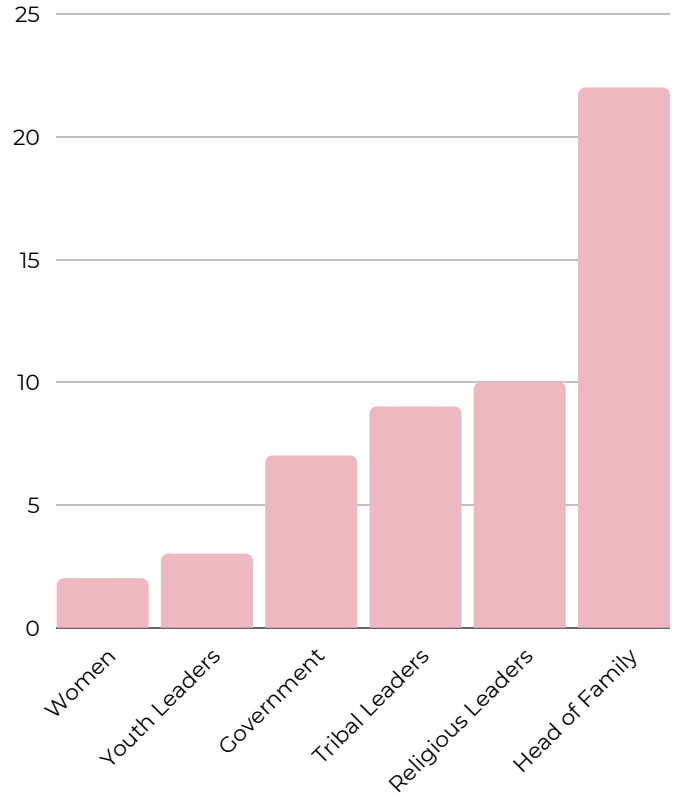
What do you hope to learn from training?

Participants stated the following skills:

- Problem-solving
- Conflict resolution for themselves and community
- Communication skills
- Self-confidence

Prior to training, 70% of participants stated that their knowledge and skills on mediation as 'not bad' or 'poor.'

Who handles conflict resolution in your community?



84%

of participants that rated soft skills training as 'good' in terms of improving their skills



Did the training change the way you approach conflicts?

The Peace Sisters indicated that training helped them to better understand people, respect other's perspectives and feelings, learn to cope with differences, and be better at teamwork.

What did you like most about the training?

The participants stated that they learned a lot by working in groups and increased their problem solving and analytical thinking skills. The training and simulations were realistic. They also enjoyed building new friendships and socializing with others through ice-breaking activities.



MEET HAJAR

I am 22 years old, from Syria and currently living in Domiz 2 Camp. I live with my 6 sisters, 1 brother, and my parents. My life has not been easy as I was born with Thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder, so I spend most of my day at home. Being sick and living in a camp with this health condition can make life so much harder.

I participated in Peace Sisters training because I love learning new things and new skills. During training, I enjoyed learning about so many new things, especially the mediation skills taught by women, which made this a significant experience for me.

I will try my best in using my new skills to spread information and knowledge about my experience. The time I spent with the Peace Sisters was so precious and fun to experience, and I hope it can continue as I feel like we have become family.

98%

of participants that rated the training as 'good' or 'excellent' in terms of knowledge gained



IMPACT: COMMUNITY

We selected the 3 most popular community initiatives led by the Peace Sisters to determine their overall impact.

Why did you attend the self-defense training?

Participants mentioned the following reasons:

- Learn self-defense skills
- Become physically and mentally healthier
- Trainer is highly qualified and popular
- Consider it a necessary skill for women so they can protect themselves from harassment

100%

of participants stated that self-defense training provided them with necessary skills and confidence

77%

of participants that rated soft skills training as 'good' in terms of improving their skills

What motivated you to participate in the Decision-Making & Self-Confidence Workshop?

An overwhelming number of participants stated that they want to improve their analytical thinking and decision-making process to help with employability and in their daily lives. They also wanted to increase their self-confidence, support their family in making decisions, and learn more about human behaviors.



MEET LAYLAN

I am 27 years old and from Duhok. I have a Bachelor's degree in agriculture. I was born and raised in Duhok city and live with 5 members of my Kurdish family.

After finishing college, I focused on developing my skills, working, and achieving my goals.

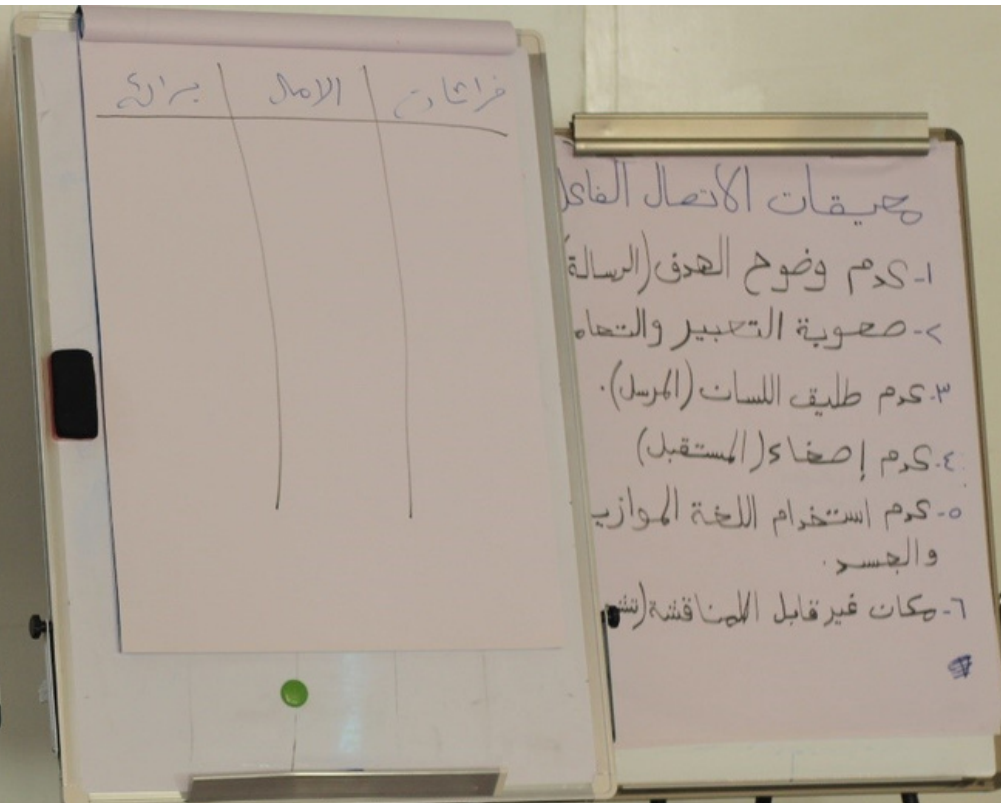
I do not live in the camps but in my contact with girls living in the camps, I knew that being an IDP or refugee is not easy as you are isolated and live a basic life. In the camps, the services are poor and there are few opportunities. I didn't know what it was like to live in the IDP and refugee camps until participating in The Lotus Flower's Peace Sisters project.

This project introduced me to the IDP and refugee communities; it was a beautiful experience to have all of these amazing, inspiring, and strong women who are struggling on a daily basis to prove their ability and potential to be represented in one room together.

I participated in Peace Sisters because I wanted to know more about mediation as it is important and necessary in conflict resolution and understanding the different parties in each conflict. I enjoyed this experience, especially meeting new girls and learning about their experiences and opinions.

My favorite thing about the training was that mediation was taught by women and girls.

The training taught me to be in control of my feelings, be more confident, and be more goal-oriented in life. I hope this project grows and reach more women and girls in the community as it is highly useful in different aspects of life.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To have a chance for long-term success, conflict resolution, mitigation, and prevention programs must be implemented in multi-year periods and ideally, multiple generations and all genders. We consider this pilot project to be a success in training women and girls from different communities to be leaders and peacemakers at the grassroots level. The best decision we made was to conduct the trainings in Duhok city and provide transportation to participants from the camps as this created a rare opportunity for women from the IDP and refugee communities to better integrate with the host community.

Based on our experience, we'd recommend the following actions:

- Conduct more trainings and activities that bring women and girls from different communities together in one venue
- Provide further training on conflict resolution skills and facilitate how women and girls can play an active role in the process
- Include men and boys in peacebuilding interventions as it's crucial for them to understand the important role women and girls could play in the peace process and learn how they can support them
- Arrange more training on different UN resolutions that are similar to UNSCR 1325 as the majority of participants indicated that this was the first time they learned about 1325
- Involve more women and girls from the refugee and IDP camps as they have very limited access to such training opportunities

Women and girls must be given more opportunities to decide, facilitate, and lead initiatives for better program sustainability.

