

RELEASE IN FULL

PD Beirut Highlights April 2016

#HackingExtremism

PD Beirut Develops Conference To Counter Violent Extremism Online From April

4-16, Embassy Beirut convened a three-day symposium titled #HackingExtremism to bring together leaders from the Lebanese government, civil society, the private sector, and academia to assess the threats posed by violent extremism online in Lebanon and develop coordinated, community-driven approaches to promoting an alternate and inclusive vision of hope for a better future. CDA



Jones opened the symposium with his keynote address. A representative from the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also spoke at the opening. A range of local and international experts participated in the conference, which included sessions on social media, messaging, Daesh's propaganda tactics, and the importance of protecting

human rights and civil liberties online when developing countermeasures. The Sawab Center's Alistair Baskey and Dubai Regional Media Hub Arabic Language Spokesperson Nathan Tek traveled to Beirut to deliver presentations on behalf of the USG.



Over the course of 3 days, a core group of 60 people - representatives from the Lebanese government, civil society, the private sector and academia - attended the symposium's panel discussions,

listened to formal presentations from experts, and worked together on developing prototypes on countering violent extremism online that would be eligible for USG funding. The format of the symposium, which included a "Town Hall" at Lebanese American University with students and others not attending the conference, enabled a diverse audience to hold discussions and develop proposals together in what was seen as an unprecedented step, given the great distrust between government and civil society. Several participants underscored this point in side conversations and in group

discussions, noting that this is itself was an indicator of success. Occasional heated discussions on controversial issues such as national security vs privacy and human rights did not prevent participants from working together in different subgroups to suggest proposals. Media outlets were present at the opening ceremony of the symposium. In the next stage, subgroups will continue to develop their proposals in order to submit them for the Embassy's review.



CDA Jones hosted a reception at his residence on April 14 for over 100 guests in honor of the participants of the. The reception was a key opportunity to underscore the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to CVE efforts and also allowed guests an opportunity to network. As part of the symposium, Public Diplomacy also organized in partnership with the Lebanese American University (LAU) and Social Media Exchange (SMEX) a town hall panel discussion – open to the public – on April 15 at LAU that tackled youth's approach to violent extremism online. Panelists included Alistair Baskey, Facebook Executive Ashraf Zeytoon, a Media studies professor, and a representative of UTOPIA NGO who works with radicalized youth in North Lebanon. LAU President Jabbara delivered welcome remarks. The discussion was moderated by SMEX, our partners on the #HackingExtremism project. The town hall discussion was livestreamed and recorded on LAU's website.



Nathan Tek was interviewed on Lebanon's most-viewed political talk show, Marcel Ghanem's *Kalam An-Nas*. The interview focused on the symposium, USG CVE efforts including the Global Coalition against Daesh, the Syria peace process, and Russia's role in Syria. Tek also emphasized that the U.S. remains firmly committed to our security partnership with Lebanon, having given nearly \$1.5 billion in security assistance since 2005. Tek also held a round table interview with 7 prominent journalists from Lebanese and pan-Arab print and online outlets, fielding questions in Arabic about U.S. policy in the region, specifically related to the Iran nuclear deal, Russia's involvement in Syria, the Syria Peace Process, and Iraq. The symposium and Tek's interviews received extensive, positive coverage in the Lebanese media.

Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Richard H. Jones

CDA Speaks At Book Donation On April 27, CDA Jones presented 250 books and educational resources to the Zouk Mikael Youth and Cultural Center. Minister of Culture Rony Arayji and Mayor Nouhad Naufel also spoke to the assembled group of municipality leaders and scout troops. In his remarks, CDA Jones noted that "Mastery of the English language enhances students' employment prospects, opens a window to a broader world of ideas and opportunities, and empowers them to contribute to the socio-economic success of their families, their communities, towns, and ultimately all of Lebanon." PD awarded a grant to the Zouk Mikael Youth and Cultural Center to purchase English language books and materials and to host English language programming that will explain American culture to community members, promote shared values, and increase cultural understanding.

Start Your Engines On April 27, CDA Jones presented 40 Harley Davidson motorcycles, four passenger vans, and five passenger buses to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) in media ceremony at the ISF Mobile Forces premises in Dbayeh. Anthony Fernandes, visiting Director of the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), Office for Africa and the Middle East, was also present at the ceremony. The passenger vans and the buses will be utilized by the Judicial Police and the ISF Academy, while the motorcycles will be used for traffic management and for VIP escort responsibilities. The ceremony, which was widely covered by Lebanese media, highlighted the continued cooperation of the USG and Lebanon to strengthen the ISF's professionalism and capabilities.

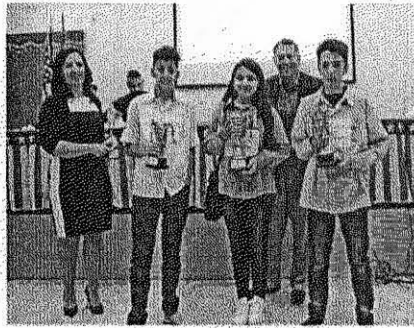
Youth Reception CDA Jones hosted a reception at his residence in honor of 100 Lebanese youth leaders. The event featured remarks by Ambassador Jones as well as speeches on behalf of the Lebanese State Alumni Community and the Youth Advisory Council. The reception was also an occasion to declare the launching of the 4th Youth Advisory Council – a PD-sponsored group of young Lebanese leaders who meet monthly to discuss current events and topics of interest for the youth of today. The Youth Advisory Council is a platform for U.S. mission staff members to engage in an honest two-way dialogue with the Lebanese youth to listen to their perspectives on pressing political, social, or economic issues.

National Spelling Bee Finals

CDA Jones presided over the final round of the U.S. Embassy-funded "Bee A Good Citizen" spelling bee competition. Twenty-one students from grades 7 and 8 participated in the national competition at the Baakline National Library, which determined the national winners and regional winners for the



Bekaa and the Chouf. Organized in partnership with USPEaK, the spelling bee brings together young students to compete in spelling words in English that promote good citizenship, democracy, tolerance, co-existence, and environmental stewardship. More than 1,100 students from 20 public and private schools in the Bekaa and Mount Lebanon (Aley-Chouf) participated in preliminary competitions within their schools during the course of the school year, while 200 students participated in the regional competitions at the U.S. Embassy's American Corners in Baakline and Zahleh in March and April. PAO Alan Holst presided



over the semi-finals on April 9, which included a thrilling spell-off for the final spot in the finals that went 36 rounds before the PAO declared both competitors winners and advanced them into the finals.

SPEAKERS



“Trash Talker” Addresses Lebanon’s Garbage Crisis
Thomas Henderson visited Lebanon April 5-10 to share his 37 years of experience in the field of waste management with government officials, municipalities and civil society representatives, as well as a lecture for civil engineering

students at Lebanese American University. Lebanon has been without official garbage collection services since last summer, leading to massive protests and political fallout, and this visit generated extensive coverage. Several media outlets (broadcast and print) covered the visit, including two exclusive TV interviews with Mr. Henderson. The visit helped the Embassy to understand in depth the waste crisis in Lebanon as well as to find ways for post to collaborate with the different NGOs and government representatives on environmental issues. The visit opened up a new opportunity to reassess the waste crisis. Pol/Econ is writing a new cable on the situation, the commercial section has been empowered with new business contacts to consider and approach regarding investment in waste management sector, and the Public Diplomacy section will seek an IVLP or IVLP on demand for various actors working in this sector to improve their collaboration and gain further insights from best practices in the US.

Mission Speaker Program APD arranged two speaking engagements by Embassy officers to discuss the U.S. elections. On April 12, ARSO Andrew Johnson visited the American Corner in Zahle, and April 1 Consular Officer Karen Glocer April 1 visited the American Corner in Baakline. Andrew and Karen answered questions from diverse audiences curious for accurate information about the U.S. political system.

EDUCATION

Competitive College Club On April 22, CAO Lindgren met with 12 EducationUSA Competitive College Club students at Amideast office in Beirut. The CAO congratulated these "best and brightest" students for receiving scholarship from prestigious U.S. universities such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University, and praised them for seizing an opportunity to develop themselves into the next generation of leaders. The students were very interested in hearing more about the educational and professional background of the CAO in a lively hour-long conversation.

National Reading Week IO Palmer and an EFM participated in National Reading Week activities at the Baakline American Corner on April 19, reading the book "Swamp Angel" to over 50 students aged 8-10 from nearby public and private schools. Students also got to play an educational board game called "Don't Say It," which helps strengthen English vocabulary. The Baakline American Corner serves the majority Druze community of the Chouf.

Lebanese American University's International Education Week CAO Rose Lindgren, Alumni Coordinator Fidaa Al Fakih and Cultural Affairs Specialist (CAS) Elie Ferneiny visited the Lebanese

American University (LAU) April 19-20 to participate in its first International Education Week. The event gathered representatives from several embassies in Lebanon and foreign universities. More than 300 students visited the fair. The Embassy had a booth and PD distributed pamphlets that explained the Embassy's exchange and academic programs. The event was an opportunity to inform students

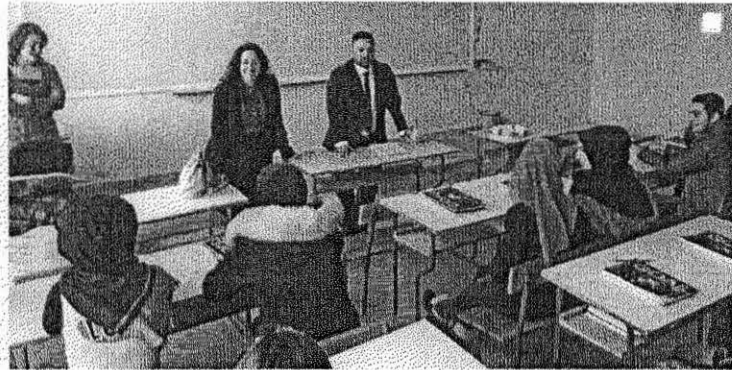


about the benefits that educational and exchange programs and study in the U.S. offer to their careers. The Lebanese American University is one of Lebanon's leading institutions of higher education with an enrollment of approximately 9000 students from different geographic and sectarian backgrounds.

Promoting Fulbright CAO Lindgren, CAS Ferneiny and Alumni Coordinator Al Fakih visited AMIDEAST/Lebanon to participate in the annual Fulbright "Meet & Greet" event organized by the Fulbright Alumni Association of Lebanon. The event brought together Fulbright alumni and prospective Fulbright Foreign Student Program applicants from different geographic and sectarian backgrounds. The alumni shared their Fulbright experience with the applicants by helping them understand the application process and explaining to them what they will benefit from the program.

Ferneiny visited the Lebanese University's School of Public Health to meet with students and inform them about Fulbright and other Embassy programs. His presentation to 120 students covered the features of the Fulbright Foreign Student program, application instructions and program timeline. The students had questions mostly on the eligibility requirements and learned also about the other programs that the Embassy offers. The Lebanese University is Lebanon's only public institution of higher learning, enrolling approximately 70,000 students representing around 50% of the student population in Lebanon. The university serves this large population at no cost and students are very diverse in terms of sectarian affiliation and come from economically less privileged backgrounds.

Lindgren and Ferneiny visited the Zahleh campus of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) on April 12 to promote the Fulbright Foreign Student and other PD programs. The Zahleh campus hosts students from various sectarian groups, many from underdeveloped rural villages in Bekaa who lack the opportunity to study abroad.



Rose and Elie met with and distributed brochures to around 200 students, who represent half of the campus student population. The presentation highlighted the requirements, procedures, benefits and timelines for the program, and provided an opportunity to inform students about the wide range of PD's exchange programs. Following the Fulbright presentation and a Q+A session, the Embassy team visited an Access cluster in Mejdal Anjar and met with high school students who are attending supplemental English language classes on the Access program.

Public Diplomacy In Action

IVLP TIP Hero On April 1, the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) released a press statement explaining the facts surrounding the disruption and arrests of a large human trafficking ring in Lebanon. The Colonel who spearheaded the operation thanked RSO, the Ambassador, PD, and the American Embassy, and specifically credited the training he was provided as part of the Trafficking in Persons IVLP he had participated in that allowed him to identify this situation and react appropriately. He said that when he first interviewed four women who had escaped from one of the brothels he was immediately reminded of the lessons he was exposed to during the IVLP, and that the knowledge he gained during his IVLP taught him the right questions to ask and the right actions to take, which led to the liberation of 75 women who were forced sex slaves. A member of PD's Youth Advisory Council reported in his popular blog on the importance of the Colonel's IVLP background, spreading the news to the Lebanese public through a credible Lebanese voice.

HIFPA Radio Interview IO Jennifer Palmer gave an Arabic interview to Radio Voice of Lebanon (93.3) on the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA) and its implications for the Lebanese economy and banks. Palmer reiterated that newly-released implementing regulations will help banks around the world understand the scope of this new law and that the safety, soundness, and security of the Lebanese financial system are a great priority for the United States. The interview aired April 26.

The Sound of Art CAO Lindgren participated in the opening of the Esma Exhibition on April 27. PD co-sponsored the exhibition with a small grant to the Beirut Art Center to install a piece by American Alvin Lucier, one of the most important American composers of experimental electronic music. "Music On a Long Thin Wire" is an installation where a piano wire extends from one end of a room to another and vibrates with a sine wave oscillator. A rich range of sounds are produced as passersby enter the electromagnetic field. Lucier's assistant will also perform two of his famous works during the opening weekend of the exhibition.

American Day On April 22nd, 220 toddlers of College Mar Roukoz in Dekwaneh celebrated "American Day" at the school with a medley of educational and fun-filled performance in the presence of the CAO. The school exposes the students to various cultures from around the world and has chosen the United States of America as a country of interest this scholastic year. The school was filled with poignant art by students of various ages. The CAO thanked the parents and teachers, stressing that their support and encouragement is what has helped the students gain exposure to the American culture and an opportunity to develop their English language skills.

Are You My Mother? As part of a PD grant to the Zouk Mikael Cultural Center to gather a collection of American books and do American-themed activities, American Citizen Services Chief Lidia Avakian read the classic children's book "Are you my mother?" to a group of children on April 9.

