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# SNAPSHOT

## A Day of Liberation!



USAID/Libya

*Hard at work at a USAID-sponsored workshop, Libyan civil society leaders hone the skills they will need to support democracy and promote human rights.*

*“Libya will now be a place where we can openly promote and protect human rights. We always knew we had rights in a general sense, but we didn’t know there were mechanisms for protecting them.”*

*—Tamer Mohammed El-Jehani  
founder of a Benghazi-based  
youth organization*

**November 2011** – The day of October 20, 2011, arrived with the battle for Muammar Qadhafi’s hometown of Sirte ongoing and the date of the hoped-for “Day of Liberation” undetermined. By early afternoon, the revolutionaries’ tri-color crescent-and-star flag had been raised over Sirte and Qadhafi was dead. After 42 years of dictatorship, Libya was free.

However, instead of joining the celebration on the street outside, 53 civil society representatives participating in a pair of USAID-funded workshops remained glued to their seats, focused on humanitarian protection techniques and strategic planning strategies.

“The most difficult work lies ahead for all of us,” said Anas Bo-oud, a representative from a local civil society organization. “We will celebrate when we’ve held our first free election.”

The workshops were held at Hamzat Wasl, a new civil society resource and learning center in downtown Benghazi. The name Hamzat Wasl employs an Arabic grammatical convention that brings sound to silent syllables—or, in the center’s case, capacity to blossoming organizations.

The first workshop, implemented in partnership with local organization Human Rights Solidarity, trained 25 men and women aspiring to become civil society leaders and advocates for the rights of fellow citizens. Led by experts from the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, the workshop covered the history and evolution of human rights principles, pertinent international laws, protection strategies, and the role of civil society in human rights monitoring and advocacy. The workshop had such a profound effect on the attendees that it has already been replicated in Tripoli.

USAID-partner Mercy Corps organized the second workshop, bringing together representatives from a diverse cross section of civil society organizations to help them develop skills they will need to take on instrumental leadership roles during Libya’s transition to democracy. The six-day workshop was facilitated by an expert trainer from the Cairo-based Center for Development Services.

In coordination with Mercy Corps and the National Transitional Council (NTC) Executive Office of Culture and Civil Society, USAID provided seed funding to equip and launch operations at the resource center, which offers vital services, including Internet stations and work space, a resource library, and professional development opportunities for rising young activists.

Representatives from the U.S. Mission to Libya, the NTC, international NGOs, and more than 30 civil society organizations based in and around Benghazi, the beating heart of Libya’s emergent civil society, attended an inauguration ceremony for the center on October 5. Remarks by Atia Lawgali, the NTC Minister of Culture and Civil Society, captured the profound change in Libya: “Just one year ago,” he said, “all of us would have been arrested for gathering here like this.”

### Telling Our Story

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