# CORDOBA WORKSHOPS REPORTS

# Peace Promotion Workshop for Religiously Inspired Actors

18 September 2013

*Author* | **Dr. Lakhdar Ghettas**
Cordoba Foundation of Geneva

**FONDATION CORDOUE DE GENÈVE**
CORDOBA FOUNDATION OF GENEVA - مؤسسة قرطبة بجنيف

Peace Promotion Workshop for Religiously Inspired Actors

16 - 17 September 2013

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011 and 2012 two workshops were held in Tunis and Istanbul respectively on the promotion of political participation of faith-based political actors and movements.[1] Following these workshops, the participants expressed their willingness and readiness to contribute to peace promotion in the MENA region through their predication and networks of charity work. Another workshop was held on September 16th and 17th, 2013, in Montreux, Switzerland on peace promotion for religiously inspired actors under the NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program. This workshop was organized by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva and the FDFA's Human Security Division's desk Religion-Politics-Conflict (RPC). The main objective of the workshop was to contribute to enhancing peace and stability in the MENA and Sahel regions; this is to be done through supporting and equipping religiously inspired actors with conflict transformation tools that would complement their local legitimacy, cross-region networks, entry points and assets they are willing to put forward in the service of peace promotion.

This workshop, which convened 15 religiously inspired participants from Rabat to Yemen and Sahel affairs experts from Niger and Chad, was structured along two phases. The First phase consisted of the delivery of training on conflict transformation basics, approaches and analysis tools. The second phase was a space for exchanging experiences among participating actors and experts. Discussions focused also on the actors' networks and entry points that could be all mobilised to launch peace mediation initiatives in the MENA region.

In addition to deepening the trust built during the Tunis and Istanbul sessions, participants thought that in light of the training received the workshop offered them the opportunity to view conflicts through new lenses. Moreover, some participants who are involved in charity work stated that as a result of the training and exchange at the workshop they now think that the humanitarian work they deliver in the region cannot be separated from conflict transformation if sustainable development were to be attained. Furthermore, a number of participants suggested their readiness to set up a Sahel region forum of experts and actors in order to exchange experiences and ideas and to launch peace promotion initiatives.

---

[1] The two workshops brought together Salafi parties and movements from six different countries, covering the region from Rabat to Sana'. They also included independent experts and academics from the Arab region as well as Evangelical and Protestant participants from the U.S and UK. The theory of change supporting this project is that if formerly excluded political groups such as Salafi actors, and in particular "participative" ones, are successfully integrated into the political spheres (democratic dialog and commitment principles and values of inclusiveness, political participation and pluralism), then this will result in an appeased political climate and contribute to the smooth political transition and co-existence in the region. The integration of these actors mitigates negative aspects and risks of political exclusion (including alienation, radicalization & non-adherence to the mentioned values and principles that represent important conflict transformation mechanisms). Executives summaries of the Tunis and Istanbul workshops are available here: (Tunis 2012) http://cordoue.ch/publications/papers-a-reports/item/305-workshop-report-tunis-september-2012; (Istanbul 2013) http://cordoue.ch/publications/papers-a-reports/item/306-workshop-report-istanbul-march-2013.

# CONTENTS

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 2011 political upheaval throughout the MENA region brought about new factors and dynamics, which continue to shake up the status quo in the MENA region. The 2011 political change either toppled long existing regimes as was the case in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen or forced reforms as what happened in Morocco. New constitutions had to be drafted and adopted as these countries embarked on a period of political transition. This process necessitated the election of new constituent assemblies as was the case in Tunisia's October 2011 Constituent Assembly election, Egypt's from novembre 2011 to January 2012 parliamentary elections, and Libya's General Congress July 2012 election. The most striking outcome of this series of elections across the region was the emergence of religiously-oriented political parties as the winners with majority blocks within the assemblies. Political polarization, however, stalled the work of these constituent assemblies which were torn between, on one hand, the pressure of the populations to deliver and on the other hand the challenges of polarization and counter-revolution. Thus, stability has become the first casualty of the transition period as the political leadership and opposition failed to strike a balance between securing party gains and safeguarding the national interest. The combination of both factors has led to a military coup in Egypt. The ousting of President Morsi has created a very fluid situation in the Arab world's most populous country. The connectedness of the political dynamics between the MENA and the Sahel regions had been already manifested in 2011; when the decline then, fall of Qaddafi's rule (and by consequence his patronage networks with the Tuareg recruits) caused the return of armed Tuareg to Northern Mali, which they claimed as their Azawad homeland. The French military intervention in Mali, a by-product of the 2011 upheaval, testifies to the strong links between Africa's northern countries and its Sub-Saharan belt region. Less than three years from the beginning of the uprising in Tunisia, the MENA and Sahel regions are in turmoil, and the risk of further deterioration of the security situation is not only real but there is the potential of an aggravation of the conflict fault lines among the regions' societies, along ethnic or sectarian lines as is the case in Egypt, Yemen and the Sahel.

A workshop on peace promotion was held in Montreux, Switzerland, on September 16th and 17th , 2013 in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the Tunis and Istanbul workshops on the promotion of political participation of new faith-based formations in the Arab world, notably the willingness of the participants to put their own and others' cross-region connections at the service of peace promotion..

The workshop was implemented within the scope of NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, in partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The program focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are the relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a "mediation space" and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

The rationale underlying the strategic choice made to implement this project through faith-based political actors and movements was motivated by the fact that those groups have accumulated a cross-region experience and knowledge over decades of their charity work. Besides, their local legitimacy and willingness to contribute to co-existence and peace, a moral and religious incentive and obligation for them, offers this peace promotion endeavour a solid foundation and advantageous starting points.

## II. TRAINING CONTENT AND OUTPUTS

### 1. CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

In order to provide participants with the basics of conflict analysis and conflict transformation: a comprehensive presentation was delivered on the evolution of the theory of conflict and peace. The presentation drew on both western literature and Muslim world tradition in matters of conflict and peace. This introductory part showed that Western theories of conflict and peace which had their origins and practice after the WWII and the Cold War can be mirrored in the Islamic tradition and the works of Muslim scholars as concepts are common but reflected through terminologies that are compatible with the cultural framework of each context. Most faith-based groups and actors believe peace promotion is a work of goodness and therefore, a moral and religious duty. This point was emphasized with references made to the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed's sayings. A third part on approaches to conflict transformation gave an inventory of the main and most approaches used by peace practitioners. The UN responses to conflict (peace-making, peace-enforcement, peace-keeping, and peace-building) were also discussed. The presentation concluded with the reminder that the success of any intervention in any conflict is conditioned by a good analysis. The latter is carried out using one or a combination of conflict analysis tools such as: the Stages of the Conflict, the Timeline, the Conflict Mapping, the Attitude-Behaviour-Context Triangle, the Positions-Interests-Needs Onion, the Conflict Tree, the Force-Field Analysis, the Pillars, and the Pyramid tool.

### 2. CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

The second segment of the training aimed to present the implementation of conflict transformation approaches and conflict analysis tools through real cases. A case where insider mediation was used as an approach to intervene in a local conflict which erupted in southeast Algeria was presented. The choice of the case was motivated by the fact that such local conflicts are the most common cases where religiously-inspired actors, such as the participants to this workshop, intervene. Beyond the details of the specific case, the focus was on the mechanisms of the conflict transformation approach (insider mediation in this case) and how it was implemented, as well as lessons learned.

A third presentation was on how dialogue platforms and mediation spaces could score successes in resolving some conflicts. An account by the initiator of dialogue platforms within a Muslim community in East London, in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, showed how forms of dialogue and exchange contributed to building trust between the Muslim community and the London Metropolitan Police. One of the aims of this initiative was to establish trust between the Muslim community and the London Police. It also aimed at convincing the Muslim youth of the need to work through peaceful institutional structures in order to express their concerns

and fears following 9/11 rather than violent means as a result of the hard security measures that were introduced by the British government.

The final segment of the introductory phase in this training was delivered in the form of a conflict mapping of the violence dynamics in Eastern Libya. Through this case, the participants were introduced to the techniques and conventions used in mapping a conflict. It was interesting to witness that the mapping suggested of the armed groups in Eastern Libya, triggered a debate among participants as to the nature of connections between the diverse actors mapped in the conflict. Another element of the debate was about the labelling of some armed groups mapped in the case.

## 3. CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION "IN PRACTICE"

After the foundation introductory part on the definition of conflict transformation, overview of approaches to conflict transformation, and tools of conflict analysis participants were split up in three small groups. The small group activities consisted in producing a conflict tree and a conflict mapping of a given conflict. The groups chose the Troika government-opposition crisis in Tunisia, the Southern separatist claims in Yemen, and the aftermath of the coup in Egypt, as cases to practice on. A sample of the small group activities' work is given in Annex 1. The aim of the small group activities was to offer participants an opportunity to test their understanding of the theoretical input and tools presented on current cases they were familiar with. The approach was to divide participants in small groups with a diverse composition according to country origin and ideological affiliation. The aim was to show that different people can and do have different analysis of the same conflict. This

was, for example, experienced when members of the group who worked on the Egyptian case had different views regarding the analysis of the case using the conflict tree tool.

## III. MAPPING OF CONFLICTS IN SAHEL

Salafi The fluid situation in Libya, its porous southern borders with Niger and Chad, as well as the French-led intervention in Mali and its aftermath have shown how both North Africa and the Sub-Saharan Sahel belt are geopolitically related. In order to deepen the participants' understanding of the nature of conflicts in the Sahel belt, two experts from Niger and Chad were invited to the workshop to offer participants an overview of the map of conflicts and tensions, local and / or regional actors and stakeholders, as well as possible paths to sustainable peace.

The Chadian expert drew various fault lines in his country: the historical one between Northern tribes which are mostly Muslim and Southern ones which are mostly Christian, between sedentary life style populations and nomads, between political and military elites, as well as between the various components of the Muslim Chadian community. The intra-Islamic tensions are dangerous because they may even impact negatively the co-existence between Muslims and Christians in Chad. The expert observed that the absence of a common ideological platform among Chadian movements means that the tribe, the territory or religion dominate relations between Chadians. Foreign actors, according to him, have always played a significant role in Chadian internal affairs. "All movements emerge in Sudan, grow up in Libya, and rule in the name of tribe in Chad", commented the expert. The fall of Qaddafi's regime has led to an improvement in the Chadian-Sudanese relations. As a result, armed groups are now

scattered. This new reality has allowed Chad to launch the "Extended Hand Policy" towards armed movements in an attempt to contain them, through integrating their soldiers in the army and rewarding their leaders by posts on government or economic privileges.

The expert from Niger explained that the situation in his country is not dissimilar from Chad. In addition to the Muslim / Christian and regional fault line there is another linguistic one between Arab Muslims and Francophone Christians. The expert noted that, for example, the Islamic University of Niger is marginalized and Arab-speaking cadre are excluded from public service jobs. In order to address those tensions the expert recommends working at three levels: 1) At the institutional level in order to ensure that the rights of all religious, linguistic and cultural minorities and groups are guaranteed in the constitution. 2) At the policy level where all groups and regions are ensured due representation in the government, and 3) Work should also be conducted at the level of civil society where the notion of citizenship and human rights should be spread in the society through educational institutions, NGOs, and political parties.

## IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE PROMOTION IN THE MENA REGION

The aftermath of the military coup in Egypt and the threats to peaceful co-existence and regional stability was at the heart of the plenary exchange among participants. The fact that most participants belong to religiously-inspired groups and movements stretching across seven countries from Mauritania to Yemen, allowed for a formidable frank and heated discussion on the support brought by some Egyptian

religious authorities and groups to the ousting of Morsi. The arguments and counter-arguments presented by these faith-based groups whose political participation is very recent reflected, in practical terms, how these groups are responding to the challenges of entering politics. A central issue in the debate was the question on what basis was the decision made inside the party structures (voting after consultation) or outside it (fatwa of religious reference / authority) to support the July coup. It was intriguing to witness how the exchange unfolded with contentions based on interpretation of various religious edicts and verses cited by these new political actors. The debate was concluded by a very interesting piece of advice by a Mauritanian participant: "the decision to support the coup by your group was, at the end of the day, an act of interpretation and judgment (*Ijtihad*) based on the context at the time. Now, and in the light of the aftermath of the coup and the stark threats it holds for peace in Egypt and the region, we can only ask your group to convene again and review your position in light of the new situation and context".

In the light of the expertise provided by external experts regarding the political, social and cultural contexts of tensions in the Sahel region, the key actors, and the possible avenues to peace promotion, a plenary exchange was stimulated among participants whereby experiences in terms of peace and co-existence promotion at country and regional levels were exchanged. In Mauritania, a Salafi participant explained how his charity group joined efforts with a Gulf relief aid organization in order to channel humanitarian aid to the Fasala refugee camp, which was set up by the UN for Malian refugees.

## V. OUTCOMES / RESULTS

1. Enhancing participants' skills in conflict analysis and conflict transformation tools: This main objective has been largely achieved as the charts produced in the small group activities of the conflict transformation in practice segment of the workshop showed. Feedback from participants through an evaluation questionnaire (see Evaluation section below) attests to this conclusion as well. While the practice section focused on the use of two analysis tools (Conflict Tree and Conflict Mapping) only as introductory basics, participants still need training on other commonly used CT tools and approaches.

2. Encouraging sharing of experiences and exchanging on networks among Salafi actors and other participants: The workshop offered a safe and trusted space for exchange and experience sharing among religiously-inspired participants, and between the latter and experts. At the end of the plenary session on this topic, all participants proposed to maintain the group as an informal contact forum in order to continue exchange with the aim of identifying and launching mediation and peace promotion initiatives.

3. Discussing resources and entry points for specific and targeted peace promotion initiatives and identifying potential pilot projects: Participants representing political actors or charity work organizations explained how their resources, assets, and entry points in different countries of the MENA / Sahel regions could be mobilized in order to launch specific peace promotion projects, in light of the experts' input during the session dedicated to brainstorming opportunities for peace initiatives in the region.

4. Acknowledging the role of Salafi actors as peace brokers: The exchange among participants and experts contributed to highlighting the potential role Salafi actors could play, through their assets and networks, to become brokers for peace not only in the MENA region but also in the Sahel belt countries.

5. Deepening of the process of trust-building initiated during the Tunis and Istanbul sessions between Salafi parties in presence of the Cordoba Foundation: Participants expressed their willingness to engage further with the CF in such a process of fostering peace in the region.
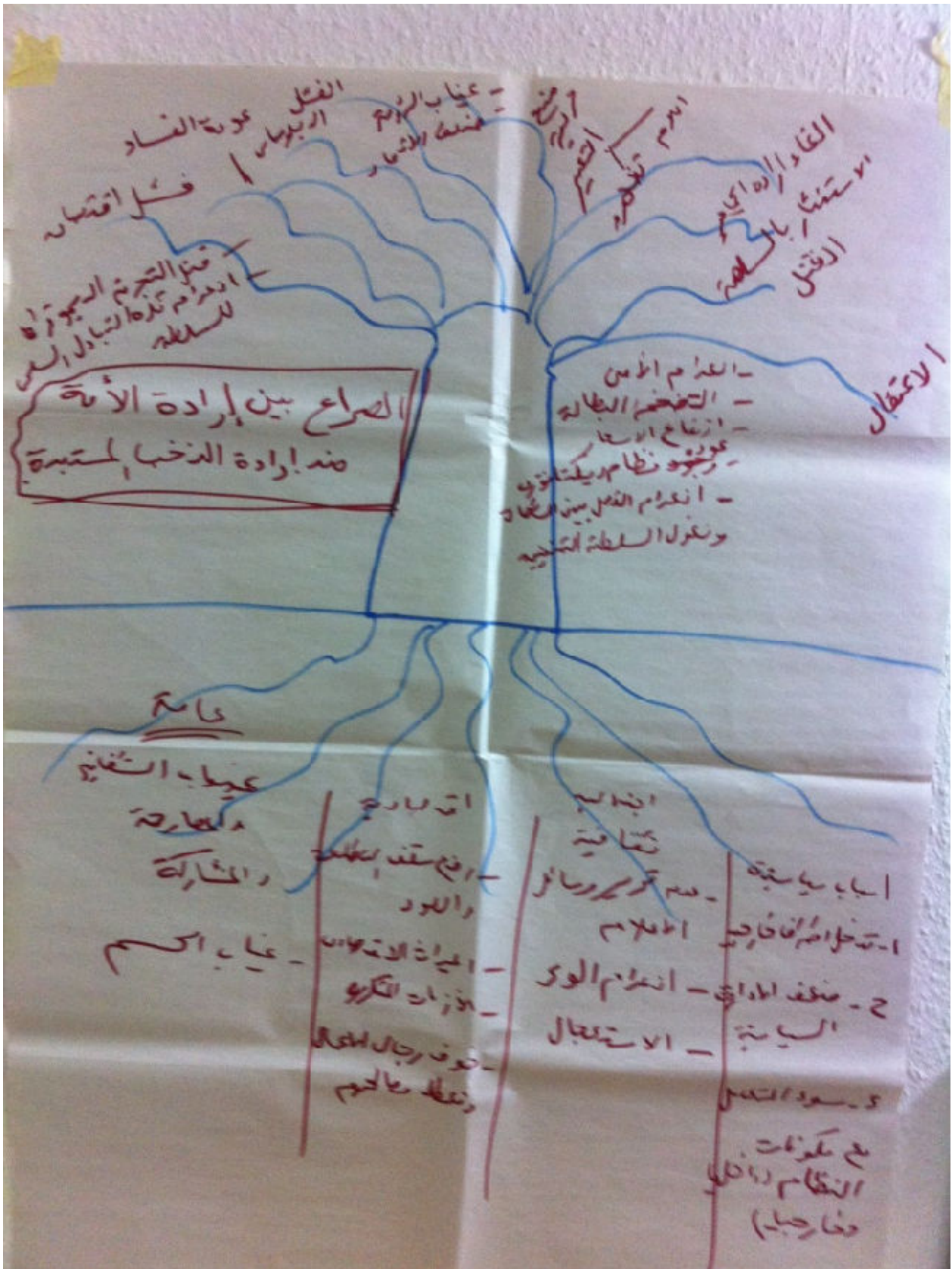
The sharing of experiences among participants and experts soon transformed into a kind of forum for the exchange of networks, connections and identification of assets that could be put practically at the service of specific peace promotion initiatives. Referring to the issue of water scarcity in northern Chad and how drilling water wells could contribute to reducing tensions between sedentary and nomad communities. An Egyptian participant explained that his group is a member of the One Nation Campaign which channels humanitarian aid to Somalia, Benin, and Kenya. A relief aid caravan could be planned for Mali and Chad. The issue of Muslim-Catholic tensions in Chad was discussed among participants and one Egyptian participant noted that their connections and entry point at Al-Azhar institution could be tapped in order to mitigate this issue before it turns into a sectarian conflict.

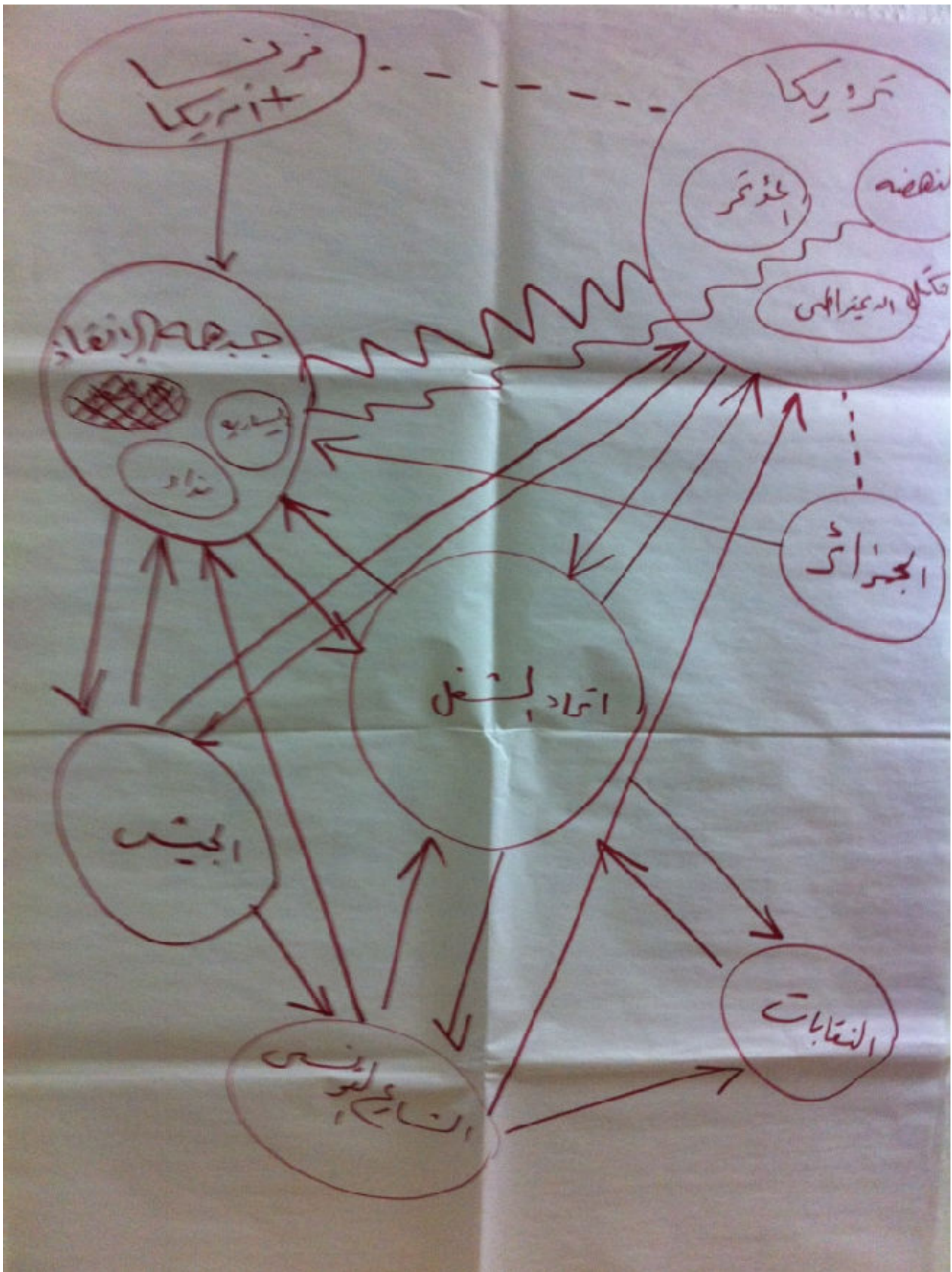The positive side effects of the workshop were manifest in the following:

- The workshop deepened trust, built during the Tunis and Istanbul workshops, between participants and the organizers.

- Readiness of participants to launch peace promotion initiatives.

- Some participants who previously focused on charity work only have come to the conclusion that in order to reach sustainable development, conflict transformation should become an integral part of their humanitarian work.

- Readiness of some participants and experts to set up an exchange forum on the Sahel. Its aim would be to serve as a space for exchange, a sounding board to monitor tensions in the Sahel belt in order to possibly launch mediation initiatives.

Conflict tree analysis of the Egyptian crisis

Mapping of the Tunisian crisis' actors and stakeholders