

The Nahr El Bared Reconstruction Commission For Civil Action and Studies

The Nahr el-Bared Reconstruction Commission – for Civil Action and Studies (NRC) is a community-based committee involving Nahr el-Bared grass-roots actors, representatives of camp committees and networks (such as the Popular Committee, Traders Committee etc.), professional planners, architects and social scientists that are producing studies, plans and strategies for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared camp in direct relation with the needs and way of life of its inhabitants. The Commission combines the contribution of local knowledge with professional expertise to further inform and impact the planning and reconstruction process.

The NRC was born out of the concern that most of the actors in charge of reconstruction have little knowledge of the camp, its way of life and its social, economic, and cultural dynamics, combined with a worrisome lack of initiatives or actions involving the inhabitants of Nahr el Bared in the planning process.

The Commission's scope includes:

- Preparing the necessary studies and research about the camp before its destruction from various perspectives (urban, social, economic etc.) as a foundation on which any planning activity needs to be based.
- Facilitating through participatory mechanisms the participation of the camp's inhabitants throughout the research, planning and design phases of the reconstruction, including:
 - Updating the camp's dwellers on news and decision regarding the planned reconstruction
 - Collecting their concerns, priorities and needs related to the reconstruction
 - Involving them in research activities and the preparation of plans and studies
 - Facilitating community decisions and actions that would be necessary at different stages of the planning process.
- Developing reconstruction plans and strategies based on the produced research and the community's feedback.
- Following up and monitoring the reconstruction process

The Commission in general would be continuously lobbying and campaigning for a greater and more active role of the Nahr el-Bard dwellers in the camp's reconstruction. The produced studies and plans are a source of knowledge for the community that would better inform them of the real choices they have in rebuilding their camp and would be a tool for empowering the Nahr el-Bared community in order to impact the planning process.

Since August 2007, the Commission is engaged in several activities:

- Drawing detailed maps of the camp describing the urban fabrics, homes, alleys, neighbourhoods, topography, landownership, land/building use, population densities, mental maps, etc.
- Conducting workshops and community meetings that document social practices, perceptions, problems, needs, aspirations in regards to the old camp and the new camp
- Researching the social practices and spatial qualities of various elements of the camp: sample neighbourhoods, homes, markets, etc.
- Preparing a reconstruction publication – to be distributed to the camp – that includes the work of the Commission, ideas and thoughts of the people on rebuilding, articles on other reconstruction experiences from Southern Lebanon, Jenin Camp in Palestine, Ein el Hilweh Camp in Lebanon, etc.
- Preparation for a design “charette” to start in late November
- Producing the “Reconstruction principles and guidelines” (details below). This document results from of a set of meetings, workshops and feedbacks with and from Nahr el-Bared inhabitants presently living in Beddawi as well as local Palestinian NGOs that endorsed the outputs of this process.

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Reconstruction Principles and Guidelines

1. The location of Nahr el Bared Camp must not change, nor any part of the population should be moved to other locations, nor should the size or the area of the camp decrease.
2. The Nahr el Bared residents and community must have a principle and active role in the process of research, planning, discussing, and decision making in all phases and procedures of the reconstruction process.
3. The reconstruction of Nahr El Bared should take into consideration the elements that shape the use of the space and its identity that were essential constituents of the everyday life and memory of the camp dwellers. Actors and planners involved in the reconstruction should not deal with the place as vacant space devoid of social, historical, economical and political dimensions nor can plans be prepared for an “ideal” camp with no relation to the camp as it existed before the conflict. The important elements that constituted Nahr el Bared should be determined by the camp dwellers through various meetings, workshops, local committees and various mechanisms that guarantee the participation of the large segments of Nahr el Bared community.
4. To ensure that all livelihood, service, leisure, popular or communal, social, economic, and political buildings are either preserved or reconstructed, as they constitute a main asset in the development of the Palestinian community of Nahr el Bared camp.
5. To rebuild Nahr el Bared as a “camp” and not under any other title. While it is understood that camps contain both positive and negative connotations simultaneously, it is important to understand their contradictions and impacts and open the discussion on this issue. What are considered advantages and strengths of a “camp” – such as the strong social relations and fabrics, the relationship with Palestine, the Right of Return, communal memory, etc. – should be determined by the camp inhabitants themselves through the mechanisms described above.
6. Any urban planning of the camp should improve the living conditions in the camp, in order to address problems such as sunlight access, ventilation, infrastructure, etc. However the following must be respected :
 - a. The camp residents must be the main actors in determining what are the problems and the priorities and how they should be solved.
 - b. The proposed improvements or changes should be studied in a detailed and professional manner, leading to a deep understanding of the consequences of the proposed changes, as well as the costs and impacts of their implementation. The comparison between the benefits and the drawbacks of the proposed changes being the basis for acceptance, refusal or modification of the latter by the community.

7. The mechanisms, procedures and criteria for damage assessment and for releasing compensation must be clear, transparent and published - taking into consideration the rights of all individuals, organisations and institutions. All meetings, discussions, decisions, plans and documents related to the reconstruction of Nahr el Bared should be published and shared with the community on a regular and systematic basis, in order to enhance transparency and the active involvement of the community in deciding their own collective future.
8. The Nahr el Bared camp should not be addressed in two parts (old camp, new camp) as both of these parts are the extension of the same social fabric, thus the Nahr el Bared camp can only be addressed as one entity.
9. No building should be destroyed, demolished or swept before:
 - a. Determining who is/are the owner(s) of the building, what is its surface area (sq.m) and what are the land borders of the property
 - b. Determining in addition to the ownership of the building, the residents of the building in case it is under a rental status.
 - c. Determining effectively and with no suspicion that the building can not be fixed or be inhabited. If it is habitable or requires minor repairs, then its residents must be allowed to return to it immediately.
 - d. All private and personal property which exist inside the building should be counted and delivered to their proper owners
10. The reconstruction should primarily involve Palestinian labour force and more specifically from Nahr el Bared camp. Also all reconstruction processes and phases should be based on local expertise and human resources from architecture, engineering, management, etc., in addition to the active participation of Nahr el Bared businesses in providing reconstruction materials, office supplies, etc.