

Hürriyet

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They came from GAP (area where the Southeastern Anatolian Project is implemented) to Washington for training and in three days changed miraculously...

HasNa, an NGO founded by Turks in Washington, is carrying out projects that target the social tensions in southeastern Anatolia...

Individuals from different cities selected by the GAP (Southeastern Anatolian Project) Administration are invited to the U.S., they are given a two-week training in communication and professional development skills. The results are amazing.

Eyebrows crossed, faces down, insistent in what they say, in a state of mind like a tightened fist. For years, only and always, he is right. This is how life is in the region where he was born and raised.

He comes to the USA. Exactly three days later, he says, "we always think that we are right, we do not know how to listen to others, we cannot tolerate each other. We make mistakes because we do not listen to the problems of others. Now when I go back to my village, if I face the same problem I will have a constructive approach."

The change is like a miracle...In three days. What is the secret?

There is an NGO in Washington, DC called HasNa. The founders are Turks. They live in the USA, but they have strong ties with Turkey. HasNa works in the field of conflict resolution. If social ties are weak, if people come from different cultures, if literacy is not strong, it breeds conflict. There is a lot of conflict within the community and among individuals. Above all, there is a great amount of prejudice. Especially in Turkey, wherever we look, there is disagreement and conflict.

Eight farmers in the U.S. Capital

HasNa, by reaching these types of people, tries to prevent conflict. They carry out two kinds of programs: one in communication and one in professional skills development.

HasNa has a connection with the GAP Administration. GAP selects the leader farmers of the region from different cities. Some are the headmen of their village, some own large pieces of land, some have gained respect in their village. GAP selects eight people and sends them to Washington.

Mustafa Aktar from Urfa, Vehbi Gonulacar from Kuyubasi village of Batman. Halil Karahan from Cagil village of Mardin, Mehmet Tahir Karakecili from Kes village of Siverek, Fikret Kurt from Ermis village of Gaziantep, Sirri Ozturk from Kahta county of Adiyaman, Ahmet Polat from Canakci village of Urfa, Ahmet Tokdemir from the Asagi Alinca village of Siverek Together with them are two agricultural engineers that work for the GAP Administration, Mr

Ismail Ugur Gumus and Ms Deniz Ozcan. Most of the program expenses are paid by HasNa, who has limited resources, and GAP provides a small supplement.

We are very nervous; dialogue is a must

Last week in Washington I chatted with these people for a while.

Among these people, who come from villages, there are those who have not gone abroad, as well as some who have not even been outside their own villages. From the center of conflict, to a three-day communication skills training program for solving conflict. What can a person learn in three days?

These are the answers I got to my questions:

"We live disconnected from other people. We are very nervous. However dialogue is a must."

"One must talk calmly and slowly and not in a harsh mood. It is necessary to be in agreement with each other. This has been engraved in my head."

"I have to accept the person I face for who they are. It is necessary to act collectively."

"What makes us different from Americans are our social attitudes and backgrounds."

"Nobody honks their car horns here and nobody goes when the light is red. This is because people have respect for each other."

"Here there is a concept of not causing harm to the environment. When I go back I will act similarly."

"One has to be at peace with himself, then with his family and then come to an understanding with people in their villages. There is no social solidarity in our country."

People living in a closed world, start to look at the world differently at the end of three days.

"To solve the Kurdish problem you have to start with yourself. There would be no problems if we acted like brothers and sisters with each other. People in the U.S. have come from all over the world, but today they all say 'I am an American'. This is what we learned."

One, among them, comes forward saying:

"It is necessary to give communication lessons to our politicians. If they go through a week of training they can govern Turkey better and they will not fight with each other."

They are going back today.

The agricultural training begins after the communication skills training ends. Each day they will visit farms. They will learn about animal farming, agricultural farming and marketing techniques. One says, "There is a machine that plants seeds and it finishes the work in one go. This same process takes us four times longer. If we had that machinery, we could plant much quicker."

After the program ends, HasNa will ask them what they learned during their two week communication and agricultural training. They are asked to give answers to the question of the three best and three worst practices they observed on the farms.

It is clear to see how these individuals have changed. Even within a short time. Because they want to live without conflict.

They are returning to Turkey today. If HasNa finds the funding for it, it will invite new people to be trained.