



BROWN

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Prize Committee
UNESCO Prize for Peace Education

To the Members of the Committee:

I am writing to enthusiastically support the nomination of Dr. Kamel Mohanna for the UNESCO Peace Education Prize. Dr. Mohanna's role as the founder and director of the premier Lebanese non-governmental humanitarian organization, Amel, make him a worthy candidate for your prestigious award. Dr. Mohanna's organization provides a broad range of social services, aiding thousands upon thousands of people, and Dr. Mohanna has personally played a critical role in humanitarian work during Lebanon's decades of periodic war and conflict. Beyond relief and development activities, Dr. Mohanna and Amel are actively working to change Lebanese society through a bottom-up approach via peace education activities.

Before elaborating on the numerous achievements and merits of Dr. Mohanna and Amel, I should explain why I feel qualified to write on behalf of Amel's nomination for the UNESCO prize. I am a professor of political science at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island in the United States and I specialize in the political economy of development and the Middle East. I am currently writing a book on the politics of non-state social welfare provision in Lebanon and, as part of my research, I have conducted over 130 interviews with more than 25 sectarian and non-sectarian social service providers in Lebanon. To supplement these interviews with provider organizations, a team of Lebanese graduate research assistants working with me has carried out an additional 150 interviews with the beneficiaries of diverse social welfare programs run by Lebanese political parties, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations. These interviews have underscored how sectarian organizations, some with exclusionary agendas, dominate the delivery of services in Lebanon. One might argue convincingly that the activities of some of these organizations perpetuate fragmented identities and work in opposition to the construction of a national citizenry with the capacity to effect social and political change.

As part of my research, I have had the privilege of visiting Amel's social centers throughout the southern suburbs of Beirut and South Lebanon. During these visits I have been greatly impressed and inspired by the work of Amel. All of Amel's staff members are committed to serving *all* communities in need, regardless of political or religious affiliation and beliefs or even of nationality. In a context where political or confessional groups dominate and seek to preserve their hold over service-related activities, Amel has constructed its own, alternative vision based on citizenship and inter-group tolerance and has developed a strong, positive reputation in Lebanese society.

Amel has long experience in helping the most underprivileged populations in Lebanon. For almost 30 years, Amel has offered medical, psycho-social, rural development, vocational training and human rights training programs to Lebanese and non-Lebanese alike. During times of conflict, Amel has played a leading role in providing humanitarian services, giving medical attention to the wounded, shuttling besieged residents of war zones to safety, and distributing basic goods to the displaced. Dr. Mohanna and his staff have repeatedly put themselves in the line of fire in order to serve needy communities. In times of relative peace and stability, Amel has easily refocused its activities to provide for basic human needs and to pursue long-term development objectives through vocational training, peace education and human rights training.

I recently spent two full days touring Amel's social centers in the southern suburbs of Beirut and in South Lebanon. I was immediately struck by the quality and range of services that these centers provide. It is clear that each program was developed in accordance with the needs of local communities. For example, in Khiyam and in its centers in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Amel offers psycho-social programs aimed at both adults and children. These are regions where the resident population has been traumatized as a result of repeated bombardments, conflict and displacement. Amel's programs make a tangible difference in the lives of children and families who have suffered greatly.

Amel's staff are highly capable. All of the doctors, nurses, coordinators of the organization's vocational and human rights training programs and administrators are committed to working to serve needy people regardless of affiliation or nationality. During my recent visits to Amel's centers throughout Lebanon, I spent a lot of time with one of Amel's ambulance drivers, who is a former detainee in the notorious Khiyam prison where Israel kept many prisoners under harsh conditions during its 22-year occupation of South Lebanon. This man is extremely knowledgeable about the needs of local communities throughout Lebanon and was personally committed to Amel's vision of positive social change through humanitarian work. Every staff member – from the doctors to the nurses to the drivers – is clearly working at the organization for more than the money. Working with Amel a way of building a new kind of Lebanon based on citizenship and equality.

Dr. Mohanna administers Amel in an exemplary fashion. While many organizations in Lebanon are run hierarchically and may be the personal fiefdoms of their directors, Dr. Mohanna has purposely constructed a participatory work environment in which staff members are encouraged to take responsibility for important decisions. The organizational culture of Amel provides ample space for input from the staff. The way Dr. Mohanna has built his own humanitarian organization corresponds well with his vision of a Lebanon founded on egalitarian and democratic social relations.

The commitment of Dr. Mohanna and his staff to serving the needy was particularly evident through its relief activities during the 2006 war. For example, despite the dangers of moving about war-torn South Lebanon, Amel was the first organization to re-establish its services in Khiyam, which was severely bombarded during the war. The staff of Amel's medical and social programs did not hesitate to drive down to Khiyam on the day after the ceasefire was declared and on the next day they reopened Amel's clinic in order to provide medical treatment and distribute basic supplies to the resident population. Importantly, Amel's mode of distributing goods and services did not follow a clientelistic pattern, as is characteristic of the relief and social programs of so many other organizations in Lebanon. Because of my confidence in the capabilities and activities of the organization, I encouraged many friends and colleagues in the U.S. to direct their donations to Amel during the 2006 war.

Dr. Mohanna deserves recognition for his personal commitment to humanitarian work, whether through Amel or in other contexts. As his biography attests, he holds numerous awards and distinctions and has held leadership positions in many Lebanese and international organizations. What is most

remarkable about Dr. Mohanna is the long experience he has accrued in helping others – often under quite dangerous and difficult circumstances. For example, during the notorious siege of Tel al-Zaatar in 1978, Dr. Mohanna was the only doctor who remained in the area to provide emergency medical care to the desperate population, which was composed mainly of Palestinian refugees. Not only did he put himself directly in the line of fire, but he also did not hesitate to help a population that has faced decades of neglect and discrimination in Lebanon. On many other occasions during and after Lebanon’s civil war, Dr. Mohanna has devoted himself to helping people under conditions of extreme duress.

Dr. Mohanna has developed an impressive organization to provide social services and, beyond this, has pursued a broader vision about changing Lebanese society for the better. On at least two occasions, I have had discussions with Dr. Mohanna on his ideas about constructing an engaged citizenry through humanitarian work. In the development studies classes that I teach at Brown University, one of my favorite books to assign is Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom*. When I listen to and read about Dr. Mohanna’s vision for Lebanon, it strikes me that Dr. Mohanna’s work puts Amartya Sen’s ideas into practice. Both Dr. Sen and Dr. Mohanna see a direct connection between improving human capabilities and promoting human freedoms. The integration of service provision with programs to build inter-group tolerance and human rights awareness is a cornerstone of Dr. Mohanna’s vision of development.

I am delighted to support Dr. Mohanna’s nomination for the prestigious UNESCO Peace Education Prize and I cannot imagine a more worthy individual to receive such a notable award. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like additional information.

Sincerely yours,



Melani Cammett