

THE DFL TIMES

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Four new Scholars start their journey at The New College of Florida in Sarasota

On August 17th, 2014 four young women from the Middle East started a new chapter of their lives to pursue their higher education studies at the New College of Florida in Sarasota, Florida. This is all made possible because of a partnership between The Daughters for Life Foundation and the New College of Florida.

When it comes to higher education for young women, it is still challenging for some of them to access the level of education they are qualified for, due to either cultural or financial factors. Regardless of the reason, Daughters for Life and the New College of Florida believe that their joint venture is a step in the right direction to reduce the number of Middle Eastern high school graduate girls deprived of the opportunity to be all that they can be. Four Scholarships are being offered for the year 2014 and this number will increase to 10 for the 2015 academic year. When the partnership was announced, a few months ago, Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, President and Founder of the foundation said: "This partnership between Daughters for Life Foundation and New College of Florida is an indication of hope and good will to make the impossible possible. When we all come together and take responsibility, we can make a positive change,"

The belief of the Foundation is that lasting peace in the Middle East depends on empowering girls and young women through education and health improvements, to develop strong voices for the betterment of life throughout the Middle East. Historically, all people in power across the region have been males. It seems few women had ever been involved in the resolution process of the various conflicts that occurred in the past decades. Based on analysis made by the Millennium Development Goals Task Force, endorsed by the United Nation Development Group, there are eight key policies and/or actions that have potential to propel progress in the Middle East. Two of them are directly in line with the foundation's vision:

1-Remove key barriers to girls' education, including by providing scholarships (even though this recommendation was originally made for local primary and high schools, our mission contributes in providing education beyond this threshold)

2- Introduce positive action to improve the numbers and influence of women in all political decision-making, including by investing in women's leadership in local decision-making structures and by creating an even playing field for men and women within political parties

By giving to more young women the opportunity to gain the knowledge and confidence needed to become leaders within their communities, the odds of them accessing more power will increase significantly. Even though there is still a lot of work to be done before this becomes a reality, let's not forget that all big things started small.

In the past, many Middle Eastern women were not given the chance to develop their skills and aptitudes to their maximum. Initiatives like these scholarships can only help change this trend. Once our first scholars return to their communities, their positive influence is likely to influence many more young girls to follow in their footsteps and, just like a spider web, the realization of their dream will spread across the region and reach more aspiring female students as it expands. It is refreshing to see that an increasing number of supporters join forces with our foundation and partners to advance such a worthy cause. History has shown that there is no limit to what can be accomplished when people unite.



Meet our Scholars (Unedited text written by Loureen)



My name is Loureen Sayej. I am a 19 year old girl that was born in the Holy City of Jerusalem, Palestine. I lived my whole entire life in a city ten minutes away from my birth place, named Ramallah. Born to a single mom in a Christian family, I attended an American Quaker school called Ramallah Friends School. I was active on campus from Student Council and Model United Nations to Basketball and Soccer. All the courses I studied throughout my high school career, such as Math, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, were all in English. I also was chosen by the main head quarter corporative along with the Ministry of Education in Palestine to participate in the Seeds of Peace international camp in Maine. I was chosen to attend the camp twice as an ambassador of peace, the first time as a camper and the second as a Leader or a Peer Support. My activities over the past years were not limited to my high school and Seeds of Peace, I was also a member of the Orthodox Club as a scout girl then a leader, and I joined Child Care Society in my hometown to plan activities for Palestinian kids.

Through this international exposure from high school to summer camp, I became aware of the excellent education system in the United States. This acted as an incentive to pursue my undergraduate degree in the United States. Growing up in unfair conditions, mainly consisted of financial hardships, and bloodshed, my mom could not afford paying a college tuition for international students. I decided not to quit rather to attend a community college, and live with my uncle. Now, I have been in the United States for a year and a half and I am attending Muscatine

Community College in Iowa. I have been excelling in the classes I have taken with a high GPA and I am very active on campus. My activities include president of Student Senate, our Phi Theta Kappa secretary, co-host for Muscatine Community College's international TV show and a member of the school's newspaper. My graduation is on May 20th, and I will transfer to New College of Florida in Sarasota, Florida to continue my education.

Born in a war zone area to a patriotic family, I decided to major in International Relations. My goal is to graduate, and work with the United Nations or a Non-Governmental Organization that advocates for women's and children's rights. I dream to become one of the renowned Palestinian women in my society. Politics has always been an aspiration for me. I like to share my experiences with others and listen to various opinions. My hobbies include: cooking, Basketball, reading, swimming and most of all travelling.



The Future of Women in the Middle East

In our previous volume we discussed the situation of women education in the Middle East countries. While our foundation is working hard in providing young talented women with the opportunity to pursue higher education studies and becoming leaders in their communities, slowly but surely, change is happening in the Middle East:

- Women recently voted in an unprecedented election in Iraq.
- Women now vote in Bahrain, Israel, Oman, Qatar and Turkey.
- Kuwait is on the verge of giving women the vote in parliamentary elections, however token that right may be.
- Women aren't allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, but the first women cab drivers made history hitting the roads in the United Arab Emirates.

These are signs that women social status is slowly changing throughout the Middle East and that our efforts to help more female students to access higher education can only help to the continuation of this trend.

One reason that Middle East economies lag is that they do not fully tap their vast resource of female talent. Two out of five women, older than 15, in the region are illiterate. Just 20% of women are in the labor force, according to the Population Reference Bureau. A World Bank study estimated that the region's average annual growth in per-capita gross national product would have been nearly a full percentage point higher between 1960 and 1992 if the Middle East gender gap in education had shrunk as quickly as East Asia's did. According to the latest Economist Intelligence Unit report "Women's economic opportunity 2012," the female labor participation rate in the Middle East and North Africa region is the lowest in the world at below 30 percent.

These findings clearly demonstrate that the Middle East has a lot to gain from integrating women in the labour world. However, the role of women in the workplace and in society still needs to be clearly defined. By allowing more educated women to climb further in the corporate and social ladder, their success might shed a light and help clarifying the benefits women can provide in a lot of different cultural sectors.