

Educating Palestinian Refugees

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Mahmoud Abbas Foundation

Courtesy of the Mahmoud Abbas Foundation

The need for social responsibility is growing by the day, and many people are feeling increasingly obliged to provide assistance and aid to those who are less fortunate.

The concept of social responsibility is the essence and cornerstone of the Mahmoud

Abbas Foundation (MAF), a Palestinian entity that dedicates all its resources and capabilities to help Palestinians who are living in refugee camps scattered throughout world, aiming to improve their living conditions, provide them with sustainable income resources, and fight for their right to live dignified lives in justice and fairness.

MAF focuses its efforts on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and on Palestinian refugees in Syria who fled to Lebanon, because the refugees in those camps are particularly marginalized, compared to refugees in other countries such as Jordan. These people have been discriminated against and denied basic human rights as well as the opportunity to practice close to 70 professions, including medicine, engineering, law, and many other professions that could have helped them overcome the obstacles they face as refugees and improve their dire living conditions.

The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon suffer from difficult life circumstances and do not enjoy most basic rights, in particular, the right to education and work. For this reason, the foundation is concerned primarily with providing both academic and vocational education to the youth living in these refugee

camps in order to give them a chance to build a future for themselves and for their families and societies. These educational programs aim to increase the graduates' chances of securing access to decent jobs beyond the parameters of the camps, thereby allowing them to be exposed to an environment where there is a broader range of opportunity and where they can engage and interact with others, and therefore open their eyes to new horizons. Despite limited resources and funding, MAF is also able to provide a few participants with the opportunity to study abroad, which exposes them to even greater possibilities and opens up new avenues for imagination and creativity.

The foundation adopts the concept of social investment, that is, investing in the refugees themselves rather than solely offering funds. This serves as a lifeboat for less fortunate youth by helping them pursue their dreams and follow their interests to become active members in their societies. Furthermore,

MAF focuses on directing students towards vocational education to increase their access to job opportunities and achieve development objectives.

as they become qualified for jobs and learn to master crafts, the private sector in these societies is strengthened, which guarantees that they can achieve sustainability and independence.

MAF works closely with the Palestinian private sector to provide the needed assistance to Palestinian refugees. The hardships that the Palestinian people have encountered have created a strong sense of empathy, solidarity and responsiveness, especially towards

■ One of the activities of MAF alumni association at Shatila Refugee Camp.





■ Young Palestinian refugees in Lebanon submitting their applications for the Student Program.



■ Palestinian children playing in an alley of a Lebanese refugee camp.

other Palestinians who have been forcibly displaced over the years. Whereas the Palestinian private sector has traditionally played a significant role in providing aid to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, these efforts have been amplified recently, as the increasing number of refugees throughout the world who need assistance has led to a decrease in international aid being allocated to Palestinian refugees.

MAF offers numerous programs that aim to enable Palestinians, wherever they live, to overcome the challenges and difficulties they face by providing social and economic assistance. In 2010, it launched its first venture in the Student Program that focused on ensuring that every Palestinian has access to education, as a basic right, and that poverty can never be an impediment. The program aims to enable all Palestinian youth

in Lebanon to enroll at vocational institutes or universities to complete their vocational or academic education.

The Takaful Program offered by the foundation provides financial support to needy Palestinian families by collecting donations from Palestinian individuals and organizations around the world. More than 320 families currently benefit from this program.

Through the Youth Empowerment Program, MAF offers courses in networking through its training center in Beirut that was accredited by CISCO to deliver such courses. Under its Communication Program, the center also offers courses in graphic design and media, working in partnership with Digital Plus Company (Al-Iqtisadi). The certificates obtained through these courses enable the youth in refugee camps to work online and thus

become more integrated in the world. MAF plans to conduct more programs in the future to increase the number of participants and give as many chances as possible to the young generation in these refugee camps.

In addition to its programs in Lebanon, the foundation also implements a program in Palestine. In 2016, MAF started its Palestine Program to help Palestinians in refugee camps and promote the resilience of Palestinians living in marginalized areas such as the Old City of Jerusalem in addition to refugee camps. The activities of the program include providing funding for higher education and collecting donations to support school students, extremely poor families, and people with special needs.

The humanitarian message that MAF conveys through its activities

is a message of hope for a brighter future that everyone in these refugee camps deserves to have. For this to be achieved, more programs and resources must be established by this foundation as well as other entities to create new windows of opportunity for those who are in need.

MAF has over 6,500 graduates and enrolled individuals who have completed the programs and courses offered by the foundation.

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