

THE 2021 LAUREATE OF THE UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD

BIOGRAPHY

JEEL ALBENA ASSOCIATION FOR HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT



Ameen Jubran is the founder of the Jeel Albena Association for Humanitarian Development (JAAHD), a non-profit organization which has been recognized as this year's laureate of the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award. The organization provides emergency services to displaced communities in northern Yemen, where thousands of displaced Yemenis have settled.

The 37-year-old Jubran was himself displaced by the fighting in 2015. He is haunted by what he saw the first time he fled for safety with his family and the apocalyptic scenes that surrounded him back then still haunt his mind to this day.

Three years later, he was nearly killed in an airstrike while working for his organization. Yet he has stayed throughout the conflict. This perseverance, humanitarian spirit and commitment to the displaced make his organization this year's laureate.

“There must have been 10,000 other people fleeing the town on foot at the same time. Some of us were crammed in the boots of cars, petrol stations along the way were set on fire.” Ameen Jubran.

In his younger years, while a student at Saada University in 2007, he was drawn to fellow students who were displaced and who, as a result of the war, couldn't go home to see their families, could barely communicate with them and often struggled to pay their university fees. As the head of the Student Union, Jubran made it his mission to help those students and continued to do so until he graduated and became displaced himself.

In 2017, after working informally with other organizations for many years, Jubran and some of his former university friends founded Jeel Albena, a non-profit organization, providing emergency services to internally displaced people in northern Yemen. To this day, his association has constructed 18,000 emergency shelters for internally displaced people, provided cash assistance to some 60,000 people and helped thousands of others through its skill-building center and school rehabilitation program.





Ameen Jubran talks to two men who are making leaf mats from khasaf, a natural material that comes from local palm trees. Jeel Albena routinely runs workshops to produce khasaf (a natural material from local palm trees) as it is a sustainable and affordable way to insulate and build shelters.

“My experience with displacement impacted me positively in how I dealt with other displaced people. I became more in touch with their needs.” Ameen Jubran.

Jeel Albena's motto is “By Yemenis, for Yemenis”, a value that has become instilled in the organization's work, not least in their flagship project of sustainable shelter building. The organization engages around 4,000 local families, who are often worse off than the internally displaced people they host in Hudaydah, to help with the production of khasaf, a natural material that comes from local palm trees known as ‘Doum’.

The fronds or khasaf are woven into layers, then placed over a shelter frame to make units. The material is not only sustainable, but it is also durable and protects families from extreme weather conditions. Some 90 per cent of the local workers employed by Jeel Albena to weave the khasaf are women.

Jeel Albena has also helped many female heads of households to be independent by teaching them sewing skills, providing them with a sewing machine and introducing them to basic business skills that enable them to sell their products in the market.

UNHCR is honoring Jeel Albena and Ameen Jurban by awarding them the prestigious UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award for 2021.

To local authorities and humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, Jeel Albena is a reliable partner in the field who stayed behind during the height of the conflict and under ongoing bombardment, even when others pulled out, to service the displaced and local communities in Yemen. They have mobilized communities, created opportunities and addressed, head-on, the complex challenges of displacement.

By recognizing the work of Jeel Albena, UNHCR hopes to highlight the dire situation of over 20.7 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, including over four million internally displaced people.

Background of the displacement situation in Yemen

The ever-escalating violence in Yemen has disrupted millions of lives, resulting in widespread civilian casualties and massive displacement. The situation is rapidly deteriorating. The most urgent need of displaced families is a dignified shelter, as over a quarter of the country's four million displaced people reside in makeshift shelters in unofficial camps. Conditions in these insalubrious camps are appalling.

The risk of a large-scale famine in the country has never been more acute. Tens of thousands of Yemenis are facing food insecurity, with a staggering five million more just one step away from famine. Displaced families are four times more at risk of famine than the rest of the Yemeni population.