



**NANSEN  
REFUGEE  
AWARD**

**2023  
PROGRAMME**  
UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD  
CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2023 • PALEXPO • GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

# The Award

Since 1954, UNHCR has recognized the extraordinary service of individuals and groups working to protect and assist forcibly displaced and stateless people.

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award is a prestigious humanitarian honour with a rich history. The Award is named after Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees for the League of Nations.

Students at Hagadera secondary school in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp carry books to the school library after a delivery by Abdullahi Mire, founder of the Refugee Youth Education Hub and winner of the 2023 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award.

Cover photo: From left to right, Rohingya storytellers Shahida Win, Abdullah Habib, Salim Khan, and Sahat Zia Hero at Kutupalong refugee settlement, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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# Programme

## UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD CEREMONY

<b>Welcome by the Master of Ceremonies</b>	Ann Curry
<b>Film</b>	<i>Nansen's Legacy</i>
<b>Musical performance</b>	Lous and the Yakuza
<b>Celebrating the Regional Winners</b>	Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>Americas</b>	Elizabeth Moreno Barco
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	Asia Al-Mashreqi
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>	Rohingya Storytellers: Abdullah Habib, Sahat Zia Hero, Salim Khan, and Shahida Win
<b>Europe</b>	Lena Grochowska and Władysław Grochowski
<b>Musical performance</b>	Miyavi
<b>Honouring the Global Laureate</b>	Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>Film</b>	<i>2023 Global Laureate</i>

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### Presentation of the 2023 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award

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<b>Acceptance speech</b>	Abdullahi Mire
<b>Musical performance</b>	Ricky Kej
<b>Close of ceremony</b>	Ann Curry



Abdullahi Mire, journalist and advocate for refugee education, poses for a photograph at a library he founded in the Dadaab refugee camps, Kenya.

# UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award 2023 Global Laureate

## Abdullahi Mire

KENYA

### Learning as a pathway to peace

The bond between learning and peace is no mere abstraction for Abdullahi. It is the object of his days, the fabric of his life, the driving impulse of the human spirit.

“Education,” he reflected several years ago, “is the midwife of peace and stability.”

It is this essential equation around which Abdullahi, a 36-year-old former refugee from Somalia and global laureate of the 2023 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award, has constructed his life – a life devoted to ensuring that every refugee can exercise their right to education, transform their individual lives, and strive to give back to their communities.

His private path from refugee to journalist, teacher and humanitarian activist has not been an easy one. As a child, Abdullahi and his family were forced to flee war in Somalia, finding safety in the Dadaab refugee camps of Kenya, where he would spend the next 23 years of his life.

Against monumental odds, he strove – to learn about the world, to understand it, to help others do the same. In 2013, Abdullahi completed his degree in journalism and public relations and his future was wide open. Yet he could not walk away from his past.

# UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award 2023 Regional Winners

Recognizing the extraordinary humanitarian efforts of  
four regional winners giving hope away from home.



Abdullahi Mire speaks with students at Hagadera secondary school after distributing books donated by members of the Somali diaspora, local youth groups in Kenya, and other donors.

©UNHCR/ANTHONY KARUMBA

Abdullahi made the life choice that has come to define his work as a humanitarian. He could have pursued a more lucrative career path, but instead set out to help create life options for other young refugees, through the power of education.

As a journalist, Abdullahi has covered refugee stories for international media. As a humanitarian, he founded the Refugee Youth Education Hub, established a library in Dadaab

and launched a Somali-language radio programme to deliver reliable health information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abdullahi's work on all fronts empowers the most vulnerable, especially refugee women and children. It gives them not just knowledge but a sense of belonging, of human dignity and of hope for the future.

"I believe education is the greatest equalizer," he says.



Since 2017, the Selection Committee has also recognized several regional winners. This year each one will receive a certificate of recognition for their outstanding service and dedication as well as financial or material support for their programmes to help sustain and strengthen the work for which they are being recognized.

2023 Regional Winner  
Americas

## Elizabeth Moreno Barco

COLOMBIA

*“Peace starts with us –  
what we can share with  
others, what we can give.”*

Elizabeth Moreno Barco (left) speaks with local leader Geidy Ismare Diripar (right) and Uldarias Guañico (centre) about efforts to improve living conditions in their indigenous Wounaan community, which has been heavily affected by the internal conflict.

They call her “Chava.” Like Elizabeth Moreno Barco herself, the casual, endearing nickname is disarming. It belies the scale and power of her work protecting people uprooted by internal armed conflict in Colombia – work that might better be described as a humanitarian force of nature.

“Of course I was afraid, like everyone else,” Chava, 55, recounts matter-of-factly, recalling the day fighting between armed groups rained chaos, terror and death down on her community along the banks of the San Juan River in the remote Chocó department. “We had never been under attack before.”

“Many people believe that peace just involves the armed groups laying down their weapons,” she goes on. “But ... if there are no guarantees for rights, if there is no self-respect, if there is no comprehensive assistance and no durable solutions, then we cannot talk about peace.”

Chava’s work for peace, from burying victims of violence and protecting children from forced recruitment to participating in peace talks

between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement and advocating for the state to meet its responsibilities to the Afro-Colombian and indigenous people of the San Juan River region, is the very definition of comprehensive.

Her life and work embody the values and actions the Nansen Refugee Award seeks to honour.

She has addressed the UN Security Council and was the first woman elected legal representative of the General Community Council of San Juan (ACADESAN), an organization representing the rights of 72 Afro-Colombian communities of the middle and lower San Juan River basin hard hit by the internal armed violence.

“Peace is not just the laying down of arms,” she says. “It is also the right to be. The right to your culture, traditions and birthplace.”

2023 Regional Winner  
Middle East and North Africa

# Asia Al-Mashreqi

YEMEN

*“Let’s all agree on a crucial point:  
All refugees – women, children and men  
– have the right to a decent life.”*



Asia Al-Mashreqi speaks to young students at an all-girls school in Sana'a, Yemen.

Asia Al-Mashreqi has a message: “You will be okay. It is your right to live a decent and happy life. Remember, you are not alone. There are people working tirelessly and faithfully to assist you.”

This is the promise that Asia makes, in word and deed, to refugees and others in need of humanitarian help in Yemen, a land of rich beauty and extreme challenges.

As founder and CEO of the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), an independent national NGO dedicated to helping the most vulnerable, Asia, 46, fights daily to keep that promise.

Her work has its origins in the challenges she faced in her youth, when prevailing customs and economic pressures deprived many girls of schooling. Yet Asia never gave up pursuing her education and her dreams.

She began her career early, achieving success as a teacher and then as principal of a leading Yemeni girl's school. She used this position to advocate for girls' education, implementing innovative programmes to support girls' empowerment and also to foster access to education for people with disabilities.

Together with a group of dedicated fellow volunteers, Asia established SDF in 2015. Its mission was and is to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals and deliver sustained, high-quality humanitarian aid through a human rights-based approach to the most vulnerable people in Yemen across social sectors.

Through it all, as a woman leading one of Yemen's largest NGOs, a consortium of civil society organizations, and a network of female leaders, she has contended with restrictions and challenges around humanitarian work. Her efforts embody the conviction and courage that the Nansen Refugee Award celebrates.

Today, SDF operates in more than half of Yemen's 21 governorates. In cooperation with other UN agencies, international NGOs, and the authorities across Yemen, it has provided humanitarian assistance to nearly two million individuals, including internally displaced people, returnees, refugees, and their host communities.

## 2023 Regional Winners Asia and the Pacific

# Refugee Storytellers: Abdullah Habib, Sahat Zia Hero, Salim Khan, and Shahida Win BANGLADESH

“Our stories show that we exist.”  
—Shahida Win

From left to right, Rohingya storytellers Sahat Zia Hero, Shahida Win, Abdullah Habib, and Salim Khan preview their latest photographs in Kutupalong refugee settlement, in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

There is no story without a voice. There is no humanity without a story.

It is these gifts – voice, story, humanity – that the Rohingya Storytellers build and give: to themselves, to nearly one million fellow stateless Rohingya refugees, and to the world.

“Our duty extends beyond merely capturing moments,” says Sahat Zia Hero, the 29-year-old co-founder of *Rohingyatorographer* magazine, one of the storytelling tools that he, Abdullah Habib, Salim Khan, Shahida Win and others living in the sprawling camps of Bangladesh, use for gathering and passing on powerful, first-hand stories of their experiences and perceptions, framed by the shared traditions and values of the Rohingya people.

“It’s about portraying our community’s narratives with dignity, accuracy and respect,” he says.

Shahida echoes this goal: “We have to tell our own stories because we are the ones who know them best.”

For Zia, Shahida, Abdullah, Salim and their colleagues, it is the telling of their collective story – through poetry, audio-visual art, journalism, photography and public speaking

– that keeps alive the identity of the Rohingya people forced to flee their native Myanmar to escape deadly, large-scale persecution.

As refugees and stateless people themselves, the Rohingya Storytellers put the voice of those who have been forcibly uprooted or deprived of nationality in the forefront, bringing the power of first-hand experience to a human odyssey too often obscured by contrived polemics.

More immediately, the Rohingya Storytellers bring vividly to life the concept of hope away from home through a shared mission that speaks to humanity and, in the process, promotes inclusion, dignity, self-reliance, education and support for the countries whose people welcome, with generosity and grace, strangers forced to run for their lives and leave everything else behind.

Through their work, the Rohingya Storytellers illustrate the values and actions the Nansen Refugee Award aims to encourage, giving the power of voice, story and agency to the most vulnerable.

2023 Regional Winners  
Europe

Lena Grochowska and  
Władysław Grochowski  
POLAND



*“I am glad that I can share what I have with others.”*

— Władysław Grochowski

Lena Grochowska and Władysław Grochowski pose for a photograph at an art exhibition in Siedlce, Poland, featuring paintings by people with disabilities who received support from their foundation.

Their corporate motto speaks of combining contradictions. But Lena Grochowska and Władysław Grochowski see not the slightest discrepancy between building a profitable business and investing prodigious sums of their time and money in humanitarian work that pays dividends of a different kind.

“I question whether the only goal of running a business is to make money,” muses Władysław, founder and chairman of a leading hotel group in Poland who, together with his wife Lena, also leads the private philanthropic Lena Grochowska Foundation. “It makes no sense at all.”

It is their uncommon success in the private sector, combined with a native compulsion to look beyond the financial bottom line and find ways to channel their resources toward people in need, that makes Lena’s and Władysław’s humanitarian work as inspired as it is impactful.

Their focus is on the vulnerable and their purpose is welcome, inclusion and practical support of those people – work that the Nansen Refugee Award is meant to further.

They launched their foundation in 2014 with the focused goal of providing support and assistance to people of Polish origin returning to Poland – often after several generations – as well as people living with disabilities.

But with the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, which triggered the largest flow of refugees in Europe since World War II, the couple immediately expanded the scope of the foundation’s work to deliver urgent and practical support to the many desperate new arrivals in Poland.

To date, the foundation, along with the couple’s Arche Group of hotels, has provided over 500,000 nights of free lodging to refugees and invested US\$4.5 million to renovate buildings in several Polish cities to provide accommodation to refugee families from Ukraine.

Their work brings to life the “whole of society” response to refugees that is needed today and exemplifies the decisive role that the private sector can and must play in responding to forced displacement around the world.





# UNSUNG HEROES

GIVING HOPE AWAY  
FROM HOME

In 1922, the Norwegian humanitarian, scientist, explorer and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for his leading role in the repatriation of prisoners of war, in international relief work and as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees”. It was a citation that illustrated the range of causes to which Nansen had devoted himself, and would continue to do so until his death in 1930.

But this man of many talents could easily have taken his career in other directions. Nansen's first vocation, as a scientist, led him to new and brilliant insights into the nervous system (he was one of the first people to propose the theory of neurons). A love of adventure, a passion for skiing and sense of national pride took him away from his microscope and towards polar exploration, which brought him great fame and a small fortune.

Diplomacy became his third, and most impactful, calling. As Norway's ambassador to Britain was his springboard to wider international engagement after the First World War. Popular, famous and admired for his honesty and integrity, Nansen was entrusted with roles that more partisan figures could not have taken on.

One of his most significant achievements was the “Nansen passport”, which served as both an identity document and a travel permit allowing holders to seek work in countries beyond the borders of the state that was hosting them. By the time the passports were discontinued in 1942, more than 50 countries had recognized them and 450,000 refugees had received one.

Today, States have the potential to provide refugees with machine-readable travel documents that would allow them to travel on an equal footing with people having national passports. These documents – serving as a kind of 21st century Nansen passport – can foster self-reliance by enabling refugees to travel safely to rejoin family members, take up work and study opportunities, and engage in cultural and leisure activities.

Nansen was an idealist willing to find pragmatic solutions. His vision, vigour and compassion live on through the work of the individuals and organizations that are awarded “the Nansen”.

**“Nothing great and good can be furthered in the world without cooperation.”**

—Fridtjof Nansen

# Continuing the Nansen Legacy

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award (originally the 'Nansen Medal') was established in 1954 and aims to extend the legacy of Fridtjof Nansen. Individuals, groups or organizations are recognized each year for their outstanding work to help refugees, internally displaced or stateless people.

Since its first laureate, Eleanor Roosevelt, the Award has celebrated the humanitarian contributions of more than 60 people and organizations all over the world. To demonstrate the truly global scale of the nominees, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award also recognizes several regional winners each year.

Fridtjof Nansen, pictured in 1908. Nansen became the first ever High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations in 1921 and shortly after developed the 'Nansen Passport.'

## Featured voices

(In order of appearance)



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### Ann Curry

Master of Ceremonies

Known for her interviews with world leaders and her humanitarian reporting, including in covering wars, natural disasters and climate change in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Mideast, and the Americas, Ann Curry is an award-winning journalist, and a former NBC News

Network international correspondent and anchor. Among her numerous humanitarian awards, she has been presented with a Medal of Valor from the Simon Wiesenthal Center for her dedication to reporting about genocide. She is the daughter of a survivor of war.



©CHARLOTTE WALES

## Lous and the Yakuza

Musical performance

Lous and the Yakuza, real name Marie-Pierra Kakoma, is a Belgian-Rwandan-Congolese artist celebrated for her unique musical style. Born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the civil war, she moved to Belgium as a child. Her multicultural background deeply influences her music, exploring themes like identity and resilience.

Beyond music, she models, creates art, and acts. Her debut album, “Gore,” established her as a boundary-pushing artist with global appeal. As one of Europe's hottest up-and-coming acts, she performs worldwide with hits like “Dilemme,” amassing millions of streams.



©UNHCR/HOUSSAM HARI

## MIYAVI

Musical performance

MIYAVI is a multifaceted artist uniting cultures worldwide through his music and philanthropic efforts. Known to his fans as the “Samurai Guitarist,” he has embarked on eight world tours spanning 30 countries, wowing audiences with his distinct guitar style. With 13 studio albums to his credit, MIYAVI has collaborated with Grammy award winning and Oscar-nominated artists and performed at

iconic venues including Dodgers Stadium and Kyoto's Kiyomizu Temple. As an actor, MIYAVI shines in the films “Unbroken,” “Kong: Skull Island,” “ARCANE,” “KATE,” and “Maleficent 2.” In 2021, he released his signature model Fender Telecaster. A versatile talent, MIYAVI walked the runway at Paris and New York Fashion Week.



© EBU/ANDRÉS PUTTING

## Ricky Kej

Musical performance

3X Grammy® Award Winner, US Billboard #1 artist, GQ Hero 2020, Ricky Kej is an internationally renowned Indian music composer and environmentalist. He has performed at prestigious venues in over 30 countries, including the UN Headquarters in New York and Geneva. Ricky has won over 100 music awards. He serves as UN Goodwill Ambassador (UNCCD), UNHCR

high-profile supporter, UNESCO MGIEP “Global Ambassador for Kindness”, UNICEF Celebrity Supporter, and Ambassador for “Earth Day Network”. His vast repertoire includes 24 studio albums released internationally, over 3,500 commercials and 8 feature films, including natural history documentary ‘Wild Karnataka’ narrated by Sir David Attenborough.




© DOMINIQUE GUINOT

## Cuisine Lab

Refugee chefs

Cuisine lab is a Geneva-based social enterprise whose team of passionate refugee chefs offer catering and event services and operate a restaurant. Its staff includes hospitality industry professionals who provide training to help under-employed refugees achieve economic independence. Cuisine Lab’s programmes are designed to empower asylum seekers and refugees through opportunities to develop their

skills, gain valuable experience, and secure meaningful employment to foster their social integration into their new community. Tonight it is collaborating with Alter Start Food, a programme run by the IFPD foundation to support the professionalization and financial autonomy of micro-entrepreneur chefs from migrant and refugee backgrounds.



## Help us find the next hero

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award recognizes extraordinary individuals or groups whose work transforms the lives of refugees, internally displaced or stateless people.

The monetary prize, generously donated by the governments of Switzerland and Norway, enables recipients of the award to continue their life-saving work.

Dr. Evan Atar, the 2018 Nansen laureate, with the newborn child of a refugee from Sudan at a maternity ward in Maban County, South Sudan.

## How can you nominate?

**Nominations for the 2024 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award open in January 2024.**

Visit [unhcr.org/nansen](https://unhcr.org/nansen) for details

Anyone can submit a nomination.

We are looking for people, groups, and organizations who have gone above and beyond the call of duty and taken extraordinary action to deliver protection, assistance, and solutions for forcibly displaced or stateless people.



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs

*“This is the UN’s oldest and most prestigious humanitarian award, named after the first High Commissioner for Refugees, Norwegian polar explorer, statesman, and Nobel laureate, Fridtjof Nansen. Norway is proud to be a longstanding partner to the Award, which recognizes exceptional individuals, their courageous efforts and the spirit of solidarity in support of those forcibly uprooted.”*

—Ambassador Tormod C. Endresen,  
Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN in Geneva



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

*“The Nansen Refugee Award honours a commitment that coincides with several of the causes that Switzerland stands for: assistance to those who must flee violence, but also access to education and culture for those in emergency situations. Last but not least, this year’s award goes to a journalist. Switzerland is convinced that a free and quality press is fundamental to democracy.”*

—Ambassador Jürg Lauber,  
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva



IKEA Foundation

*“Leading by example and action are two things that we believe are needed most today to meet some of the incredible challenges that we face. The IKEA Foundation is proud to support the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Awards to highlight those who have taken action to help those forced to flee their homes, and we hope that others will follow in these footsteps.”*

—Per Heggnes,  
CEO of IKEA Foundation



A volunteer from the Mbera Fire Brigade, the 2022 Africa regional winner of the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award, waters seedlings at Mbera refugee camp in Mauritania.

© UNHCR/COLIN DELPOSSÉ



# NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD

With generous support from



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