

**NANSEN
REFUGEE
AWARD**

2022 PROGRAMME

UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD
CEREMONY

Monday, 10 October 2022 • HEAD – Genève, University of Art and Design • 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.

This year, we recognize Dr. Angela Merkel, the Former Federal Chancellor of Germany, for demonstrating extraordinary leadership, courage and compassion in ensuring the protection of hundreds of thousands of desperate people fleeing war, persecution and human rights abuses.

Afghan refugee Salim Mohamadi swims at a pool in Neu Wulmstorf, Germany, where local volunteers give lessons to refugees, in April 2017.

Cover photo: Master baker Björn Wiese teaches Syrian refugee Mohamad Hamza Alemam to bake in Eberswalde, Germany, in December 2018.

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Programme

UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD CEREMONY

- Welcome by the Master of Ceremonies** Nelufar Hedayat
- Film** *Nansen centenary*
- Keynote speaker** Barbara Hendricks
- Film** *Regional winners showcase*
- Celebrating the Regional Winners** Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- Musical performance** Manal Samaan
- Honouring the 2022 Laureate** Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- Film** *Leadership, courage and compassion*

Presentation of the 2022 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award

- Acceptance speech** Dr. Angela Merkel, Former Federal Chancellor
- Musical performance** Tusse
- Close of ceremony** Nelufar Hedayat



Then Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel works in her office at the Federal Chancellery building in Berlin, Germany, in July 2011.

UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award 2022 Global Laureate

Dr. Angela Merkel

Former Federal Chancellor

Leadership, courage and compassion

In 2015 and 2016, at the height of the conflict in Syria and with deadly violence in other countries, Germany welcomed more than 1.2 million refugees and asylum seekers who had made the often perilous journey to the European Union. As Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel described the situation as one “which put our European values to the test as seldom before”.

It was a test that Germany passed at home and internationally. Not only did Dr. Merkel extend her country’s protection of people forced to flee war, persecution and human rights abuses, but she was also the driving force behind

Germany’s collective efforts to receive them and help them integrate into society, through education and training programmes, employment schemes and labour market integration.

The former Chancellor was also instrumental in ensuring Germany’s growth as a substantive, reliable and active humanitarian partner, including in refugee operations around the world. Both her policies and her public statements were positive forces in European and global debates on issues of asylum and the management of crises of forced displacement.



Then Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks with a refugee family while visiting a branch of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Spandau, Berlin, in October 2015.

© BUNDESREGIERUNG/STEFFEN KUGLER

It was a humanitarian approach that was typified by the way Dr. Merkel called on her fellow Germans to reject divisive nationalism, urging them instead to be “self-assured and free, compassionate and open-minded”.

In making its decision, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award selection committee said it was recognizing Former Federal Chancellor Merkel’s “leadership, courage and compassion in ensuring the protection of hundreds of thousands of desperate people” as well as her efforts to find “viable long-term solutions” for those seeking safety.

UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award 2022 Regional Winners

Recognizing the incredible humanitarian efforts of four regional winners.



Since 2017, the selection committee has also recognized several regional winners. Traditionally, each one receives a certificate of recognition for their excellent service and dedication. This year, for the first time, they will also receive a monetary prize to help sustain and strengthen the programmes for which they are being recognized.

2022 Regional Winners Africa

Mbera Fire Brigade

MAURITANIA

“We are volunteers because we have to [be]. The bushfire is a predator to us. If we don’t go to put it out, it will burn the camps, it will burn the goats, it will burn the grass.”



Members of the Mbera Fire Brigade use branches to beat out a large bush fire near the Mauritanian border with Mali.

“When we see a bushfire, all we have in our minds is to save and protect,” says Ahmedou Ag Albohary, leader of the Mbera Fire Brigade. “We have to make sure we save the people – including those who are fighting the bushfires.”

Over the past decade, this all-volunteer group of firefighters has extinguished more than a hundred bushfires and planted thousands of trees. Their actions save lives, livelihoods and a local environment that is increasingly under threat due to climate change.

Born in Mali, Ahmedou has been displaced twice by conflict, most recently in 2012. While living in Mbera refugee camp, in southeastern Mauritania, he grew alarmed by the wildfires ravaging the nearby forests and pasturelands. So in 2013 he joined dozens of fellow refugees to help put out bushfires in areas around the camp and the town of Bassikounou, in the Hodh Chargui region.

About 90 per cent of Mauritania’s territory is desert, making it especially vulnerable to the effects of deforestation and drought. In the dry season, from September to July, temperatures routinely soar above 40C. Bushfires are more frequent during this period and the brigade often works long shifts – sometimes 12 hours at a time, several days in a row.

Without proper firefighting equipment and protective clothing, the work can be dangerous. But through years of training and experience they have developed techniques to minimize the risks. One involves clearing large swathes of land of dry grass, to cut off the path of an approaching bushfire. Another requires more hands and coordination: when a fire is close to the camp, the entire brigade goes out, as well as many other refugees, to fetch water and pour it around the camp. When the fire reaches the damp areas, the brigade is able to put it out with branches.

When not training or putting out fires, brigade members spend time tending to saplings and planting trees. They also build fire breaks – stretches of land cleared of dried plant debris and other vegetation. Their efforts have brought refugee and local communities together: the group now has nearly 500 members, including Mauritians.

“Our parents said that the one who takes care of the forest and the trees does not die in vain,” says Ahmedou. “Because as long as the trees he planted exist and the forests and wildlife he protected exist, people will remember him.”

2022 Regional Winners Americas

Vicenta González

COSTA RICA

“If we don’t know our own rights, we can never lift our heads high.”

An asylum seeker from Nicaragua (left) prunes cacao trees with Vicenta González in northern Costa Rica.

Women have been travelling to Vicenta González to seek her help for half a century. Her farm lies at the end of a dirt road in a remote region of northern Costa Rica. During the rainy season, the route becomes almost impassable – but even then the visitors arrive, some in vehicles, many more on foot.

At an age when many people are settling into retirement, Vicenta, a 74-year-old great-grandmother, has never been busier. From launching community projects and putting people to work in an area plagued by unemployment, to empowering women and finding refuge for survivors of gender-based violence, she is a fulcrum of her community.

Since the start of a social and political crisis in Costa Rica’s northern neighbour, Nicaragua, in 2018, which has seen more than 200,000 people flee, Vicenta has also worked tirelessly to provide food, shelter, and other basics to female asylum seekers and their children. “They are very much in need,” said Vicenta, whose farm is just a few kilometres from the border. “I have to be a nurse, a doctor, a counsellor, a babysitter.”

Vicenta was born in Nicaragua but met her Costa Rican husband and moved to his country 55 years ago. After the couple bought an 11-hectare farm with an old-growth cacao plantation, she quickly became a key figure in the community, emerging as the go-to midwife and the closest thing to a first responder. Over the decades, she delivered some 213 babies, had two children of her own and took in and raised three more.

Helping countless survivors of gender-based violence led Vicenta to form the Association of Entrepreneur Women of Upala (AMECUP), an organization dedicated to helping defend women and their rights. She has also given over much of her property to the cause, providing the cacao pods from her organic plantation to serve as the raw material for a wide range of products – from chocolate bars and even “cacao wine” to face creams and lip gloss. The group sells its products under the label Cacaotica, and in exchange its members help tend the plantation’s 3,000 trees.

Asked if she ever feared that her work could put her in danger, Vicenta recalled one incident in which the husband of a woman to whom she had given shelter threatened her. “I told him, ‘Well, if I’m going to die because of something, it will be defending women.’”

2022 Regional Winners Asia and the Pacific

Meikswei Myanmar

MYANMAR

"We are successful, because we do things from the heart. We build trust with people, no matter how hard or challenging it is."

Meikswei Myanmar founder Naw Bway Khu meets the children and teachers at a school in, Shan State, Myanmar.

Two decades ago, Naw Bway Khu's life started anew. She had endured years of domestic violence at the hands of her husband, but when he died in 2002, she decided that she wanted to help women who were in similarly vulnerable situations, dedicating herself to a life of second chances.

Meikswei Myanmar – "Friends of Myanmar" – was the result.

After two years working for an international NGO that cared for people living with HIV/AIDS, Naw Bway Khu struck out on her own. She set up Meikswei Myanmar to provide antiretroviral therapy and places of refuge for women and children living with the disease.

To start with she accommodated women in her own home before establishing a centre in Lashio, the largest town in Myanmar's northern Shan State, and later set up an orphanage. "I was freed from my previous life and wanted to help women who were [HIV] positive," she recalls. "I wanted them to live a long life and fulfil their dreams."

As Meikswei Myanmar started to care for more patients in rural and isolated communities, Naw Bway Khu, 54, noticed that many lacked access to basic services. She gradually expanded Meikswei's programming to offer psychosocial support, education and income-generating activities.

In 2015, decades of conflict in northern Shan State escalated, forcing tens of thousands to flee. While aid reached those who made it to camps for internally displaced people, those who sought safety in villages were getting little to no assistance. Meikswei used funds pooled from staff, their families and friends to mount an emergency response, distributing food and basic items. Naw Bway Khu also advocated for more international aid to be allocated to host communities supporting the displaced.

Today, Meikswei implements a range of activities to support internally displaced people, host communities and other vulnerable groups in 330 locations across six regions and states. Its activities directly benefited some 25,000 people in 2021, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic – and the military takeover that took place that year.

Other initiatives extend to support for local organizations, training them on basic humanitarian responses. "There is a Myanmar proverb that says one sturdy tree can support 10,000 birds," says Mai Ye Win Aung, who leads a civil society organization in Shan State. "Meikswei is like a big shady tree, supporting organizations like us to have the confidence and capacity to carry out our work."

2022 Regional Winners Middle East and North Africa

Dr. Nagham Hasan IRAQ

“I saw the catastrophe that happened to the Yazidi women – the way they were subjected to verbal abuse and rape... [The survivors] still need help, so I don’t want to give up on them.”



To the women of Rwanga camp who were once captives of the extremist group ISIS, Nagham Nawzat is many things: gynaecologist, counsellor, humanitarian and a source of solace after unimaginable horrors.

This becomes evident as you watch her at work, sitting at the heart of a group who have gathered to see her in a room in this camp mainly populated by Yazidis, a religious minority in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Wearing a white doctor’s coat, Dr. Nagham, 45, holds one woman’s hand, checks the pulse of the second and reassures a third. All were once in the hands of ISIS; many lost their husbands and children. “I am always here to support you,” says Dr. Nagham. “If I can’t support you it’s because it is not in my power. My aim is to take you through the trauma you experienced.”

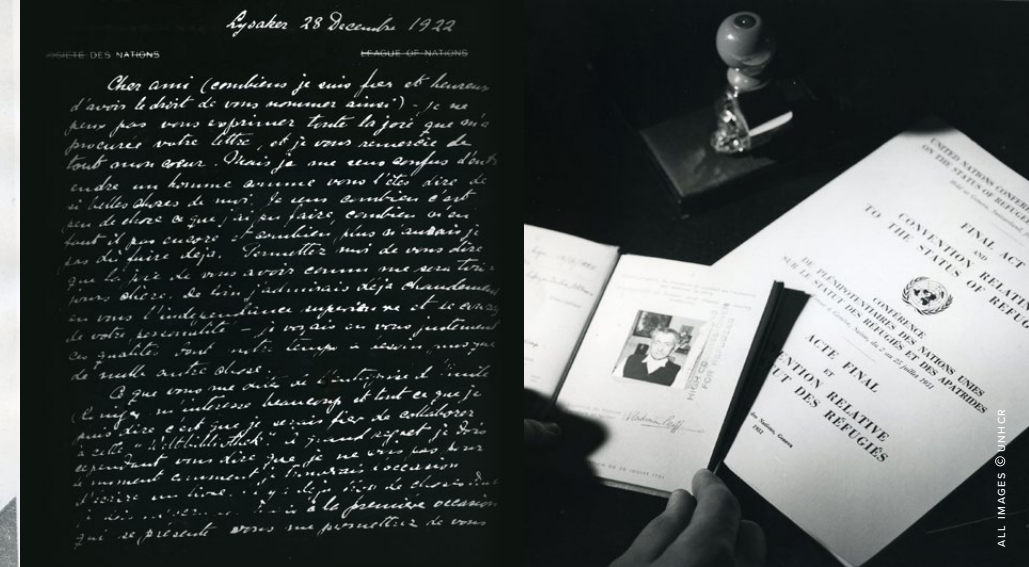
In August 2014, ISIS fighters captured the town of Sinjar in northwestern Iraq. They set about massacring Yazidi men and abducting more than 6,000 Yazidi women and children. Sinjar was recaptured a year later, but some 3,000 Yazidis remain missing and over 300,000 are still displaced.

Dr. Nagham Hasan is pictured at the Rwanga camp for internally displaced people in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Dr. Nagham had trained as a doctor in Mosul and began her career intending to treat women who were unable to conceive. The events of 2014 gave her another goal. “I saw the catastrophe that happened to the Yazidi women,” she says. When everyone else was fleeing, she headed to the camps to help former ISIS captives, who needed treatment for infections and injuries caused by poor living conditions, torture and sexual abuse.

Soon after, Dr. Nagham established an NGO, Hope Makers, and also works as director of Sheikhan General Hospital in Nineveh governorate. So far she has treated 1,200 former captives. Hope Makers now has 50 staff and two clinics in Sinjar offering counselling and community outreach for ISIS survivors.

One of her patients, a woman called Leila who lost her husband and three of her sons to ISIS, managed to escape but needed an operation because of the torture she endured. That operation was arranged thanks to Nagham, she says. “From the minute we arrived home we benefited from the doctor’s support, and she is still helping us,” Leila adds. “She is always there for us.”



C E L E B R A T I N G



Y E A R S
W I T H N A N S E N

One hundred years ago, 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 the career of this man of many talents could easily have gone off 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.

Even this was not to be the career on which Nansen settled. A spell 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 is also 100 years old in 2022. The “Nansen passport” 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.

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. people all over the world. To demonstrate the truly global scale of the nominees, the Nansen Refugee Award also recognizes four regional finalists each year – dedicated individuals or groups who are also making an impact on the lives of forcibly displaced or stateless people.

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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Nelufar Hedayat

Master of Ceremonies

Nelufar Hedayat is an award-winning journalist and presenter whose work focuses on environmental issues and cultural upheaval. Born in Afghanistan, she came to Britain as a refugee, an experience that has informed her reporting and instilled a passion for telling the stories of fringe and marginalized communities.

Working across British and American broadcasters in written and TV media, she has created self-authored series and documentaries and moderated talk-shows and other events for news outlets such as Nat Geo, Doha Debates, Vice, Fusion, The Guardian and the BBC. Her work has received numerous awards, and her reporting and interviews are often referred to as empathetic, pioneering and insightful.



Barbara Hendricks

Keynote speaker

Born in USA, dual Swiss/Swedish citizenship, she received BM, Juilliard and BS (Mathematics Chemistry) at age 20, University of Nebraska. Since her debut in 1974, she became one of the world's most loved and admired opera, recital, and jazz musicians, recording 100 albums and selling more than 14 million.

Appointed in 1987, Barbara is UNHCR's longest serving Goodwill Ambassador. Named Honorary Lifetime GWA in 2002, in recognition of her outstanding commitment to refugees, she has supported UNHCR's work at the diplomatic and governmental level. Her impassioned plea for the refugee cause to the European Parliament on the 60th anniversary of The Treaty of Rome, received a standing ovation. Active in UNHCR's campaign to end statelessness, Barbara spoke at the 2015 ECOWAS Conference in Côte D'Ivoire that resulted in The Abidjan Declaration. In 2009, she was founding president of UNHCR's national fundraising partner, Sweden for UNHCR, and is active as President Emeritus.

Manal Samaan

Musical Performance

Manal Samaan is a solo vocalist and Syrian refugee living in Switzerland. She was still a student at Syria's leading musical institute, the Higher Institute of Music in Damascus, when she began the first of many collaborations with the celebrated Lebanese composer Ziad Rahbani. Upon graduating in 2008, she set out to use her voice and her artistic message to benefit her community – but less than three years later, her homeland erupted in conflict.

Since finding refuge in Switzerland, Samaan has continued to develop her expansive repertoire, which includes Byzantine hymns and Armenian love songs as well as classic ballads by Rahbani's mother, the iconic Fairuz. Samaan has toured and performed across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in Europe and Australia. Performing with her tonight are Elie Maalouf (piano and arrangement), Frédéric Folmer (acoustic bass) and Youssef Hbeisch (percussion).





Tusse

Musical performance

Tousin “Tusse” Chiza is a musician and singer who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He fled to neighbouring Uganda at age five together with his aunt. After three years in a refugee camp there, he was resettled to Sweden.

In 2021, Tusse represented Sweden at the Grand Final of the Eurovision Song Contest with the powerful song “Voices”. He openly shares his experience in overcoming challenges of settling in and adapting to new situations, helping to empower young people facing similar difficulties. He has been a Goodwill Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR since 2021.

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Sritharan Thambithurai


Refugee Chef

Known as Chef Sri, Thambithurai Sritharan is an asylum seeker from Sri Lanka whose repertoire, after 20 years in the food industry, includes Chinese, Indian, Sri Lankan and Western cuisine. As a member of Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority, he was imprisoned for three years before fleeing his country in 1997.

Chef Sri arrived in Switzerland in 2016, but has been separated from his family ever since. Cooking, he says, “is a way for me to make people happy, to share what I can offer.”



© UNHCR/MARK HENLEY



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 2023 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award open in January 2023.

Visit unhcr.org/nansen for details

Anyone can submit a nomination.

We are looking for people and organizations who demonstrate courage; whose work goes beyond the call of duty and outside of their normal activities; people who spend an extraordinary amount of time and effort helping the forcibly displaced and stateless.



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

“Norway is a longstanding partner of the UN Refugee Agency on what is the UN’s oldest and most prestigious humanitarian award, named after our famed Norwegian polar explorer, statesman and Nobel laureate, Fridtjof Nansen. The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award is a valuable part of safeguarding Nansen’s humanitarian legacy through recognizing the spirit of solidarity and courageous efforts to support those forcibly uprooted.”

—Ambassador Tine Mørch Smith,
Permanent Representative of Norway



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

“Fridtjof Nansen, through his work, embodies the values that guide Swiss foreign policy. The award that bears his name recognizes the efforts of those who put them into practice. Switzerland is deeply grateful to them.”

—Ambassador Jürg Lauber,
Permanent Representative of Switzerland

IKEA Foundation


“The IKEA Foundation is proud to support the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award and, by extension, those who are forced to flee their homes. Problems of this magnitude can seem unsurmountable at times, which makes it especially important to recognize and share the stories of those who choose to help – and give hope.”

—Per Heggnes,
CEO of IKEA Foundation



Ramy Syriani, a Syrian Palestinian refugee, enjoys a day out with his volunteer mentor, Antonia Klein, in Berlin in May 2016. They met through a programme that helps newcomers assimilate into the German way of life.

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NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD

With generous support from



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