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## Corona... and taking care of our children

This introduction may be imaginary and it is directed to our children and their parents, but it could represent the reality we have been living for many months. We have witnessed its crises and negative aspects that affected our life every day and changed its concept, cancelled our traditions and took us to another world that we have not seen since centuries, through the dangerous epidemic encountered by the entire world, which was extensively expanding as lightning and reached all parts of the world. It was known as “Corona” pandemic and everyone started asking: What is this epidemic? Where did it come from? How did it reach us?

This epidemic has become the main concern for everyone and a priority in our daily life that has been turned upside down. Now, we are only looking for measures to prevent it, ways of protection that keep us away from it, listening to the news and reviewing the instructions of the relevant ministries about it to find out how to fight it.

The march of life has changed; airports and institutions were closed; schools, clubs, restaurants and parks were locked; and all protection and prevention measures have been taken, including social distancing and family meeting. Then, we are wearing now gloves to prevent touching and wearing masks on our faces to take care of the mouth and nose, so as not to transmit the infection to our loved ones. Sterilizers became a substitute for perfumes and cosmetics products.

Our children were forbidden from meeting their friends and relatives. Distancing has become dominant among family members. Electronic means of communication became the pulse instead of the heart and our attention is now focused on care and prevention to ensure safety. Hospitals became insufficient with all their capacities to accommodate the people infected by this epidemic.

Our children were forbidden from going to school and remote learning was imposed on them through electronic means, which deprived them of the pleasure of meeting, the enjoyment of playing and football and the beautiful conversations of teenage girls.

Our children were deprived of family gatherings, the beauty of nature and the enjoyment of its bounties and pure air. Instead, children are now playing around the house, where the rough walls exist, which would never be like the extent and beauty of the world around them, regardless of their longitude.

Our children were deprived of entertainment trips and sport clubs, visiting public library clubs, attending their own workshops, shopping and visiting malls and eating fast food and ice cream, of which they are highly fond, like playing and sitting in parks.

Then, how can we compensate our children for this period taken away from their lives while growing up quickly? How will we overcome it and provide them with a strong substance that calms their hearts, relieves them and gives them confidence in themselves while learning what is more important than preventing a pandemic, which they do not need to know about and while studying, reading and playing without restrictions outside the walls, within which this pandemic placed us?

Based on this standpoint, we must shed light on studies and researches on children, which provide advice and methods that should be followed to take care of them, so that we can compensate them for the difficulties and obstacles they have encountered, especially with the assistance of the entities that have the potentials, researches and teams specialized in childcare, which would provide family and educational advice and initiatives to preserve the health of children, provide them with good nutrition and continue their education, as well as support families to cover the needs of their children.

**Mr. Nasser Assi**  
President of Arab Children Book Publisher's Forum

## Initiatives of Sheikha Bodour Al Qassimi represent an added value to the publishing world



Amid atmospheres of optimism and caution, publishers in various countries of the world are trying to rearrange their situations to keep pace with the prevailing conditions in our world today, relying on the experience of the past year, which witnessed many periods of lockdown.

Undoubtedly, the publishing sector has suffered in many sectors. However, by the grace of Allah, the humanity began to rise up with the emergence of many initiatives that aimed at restoring confidence through arranging priorities according to new visions and innovations.

In fact, publishers, not only Arabs, but all publishers around the entire world, were very pleased with the election of Sheikha Bodour to preside the International Publishers Association, as she is known for her strong will that made her name associated with many tangible achievements in the field of publishing and culture, whether inside or outside the UAE.

Sheikha Bodour was keen, at the beginning of her presidency of the International Publishers Association, on meeting publishers from various disciplines, as her meeting with the Arab Publishers Association and discussion of many issues of the Arab publisher with it had the best effect on stimulating renewed and creative giving. It is the same impression that was deeply established in her meeting with the Egyptian Publishers Association and other associations.

The choice of her second destination associated with important quick visits to Republic of Kenya, had great significance in openness to everyone, while giving due care to the African forefront, especially that Nairobi is one of the most promising hubs for the African continent in the field of publishing. In addition, after visiting Nairobi, she headed to some African capitals and others to encourage publishing and knowledge.

Hence, we can view that this opportunity is appropriate to take advantage of this smart initiative as a window, from which the Arab publisher can see the African space and explore more aspects of interaction and cooperation within the framework of the cultural openness that our world is witnessing today.

Needless to emphasize that these initiatives of Her Highness Sheikha Bodour Al Qassimi were launched at a time in which the Arab publishing sector needs to be encouraged and devise more methods, techniques and tools that would make this sector flexible, in order to achieve its expansion and meet the high demand of knowledge in our world today.

**Ms. Aisha Hamad Meghawer**  
Secretary-General



**“Inaugurated by  
SULTAN AL QASSIMI”  
Innovative Cultural Project of House of Wisdom**

His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qassimi, Member of Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, on 9 December 2020, accompanied by Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qassimi, Head of Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), inaugurated the “House of Wisdom” building, which represents an innovative cultural project embodying the latest model for future libraries in the world and documenting the history of granting the title of World Book Capital to the Emirate of Sharjah by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2019, as it represents a living legacy for Sharjah due to receiving the highest cultural title.

His Highness Ruler of Sharjah toured the building, as he started his visit by roaming the huge library in the “House of Wisdom”, which will contain 305,000 books in various cultural, literary and knowledge fields, of which 11,000 books are written in different languages, 105,000 are paper books and around 200,000 books are electronic.

His Highness was informed by the officials in charge of the project that the House of Wisdom embodied His Highness’s vision for presenting a model for libraries that combines, in an innovative way, between the concepts of the library and the social and cultural meeting place and turns it into a social platform for learning and knowledge, reinforced by innovation tools and advanced technologies. His Highness visited the separate library for children, which contains more than 2000 books and Young People Section Library,



which includes around 3000 books.

His Highness Ruler of Sharjah inspected the facilities and laboratories allocated by the House of Wisdom for visitors, as His Highness reviewed the self-service station “Books Espresso”, which is characterized by its high ability and speed to print books in a record period. It was provided by the House of Wisdom to enable visitors to print and package any book with high technologies.

His Highness, Ruler of Sharjah, visited and roamed the facilities designated by the “House of Wisdom” for women and children, as he visited “Ladies’ Diwan” (a hall for women), and the “Little Reader” hall, which was specially allocated and dedicated for children from 3 to 10 years old. It provides children with various programs in Arabic and English and presents different topics on innovation, technology and sustainability, and at the same time it will provide the young reader with a spacious place to learn and read.



## In her meeting with the Board of Arab Publishers Association **SHEIKHA BODOUR AL QASSIMI** Arab publishing sector has promising opportunities

**Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qassimi, President of International Publishers Association, emphasized that the Association gives due care to effective and open communication with publishers unions and associations around the world to discuss the developments and challenges in the publishing sector and to identify new business models that are in line with developments in the previous phase.**

Sheikha Bodour Al Qassimi said: “We have developed a plan to hold a series of in-depth meetings and dialogues with publishers around the world and we started with Arab Publishers Association and the Egyptian Publishers Association.

Sheikha Bodour mentioned that the Arab publishing sector has promising opportunities, as the percentage of Arab young people is one of the highest percentages in the world. This group is enthusiastic for knowledge and looks forward to everything new and creative. Hence, this constitutes an incentive and inspiration for publishers.

The above was stated during Sheikha Bodour Al Qassimi’s meeting with the members of Arab Publishers Association and members of the Egyptian Publishers Association in Cairo, as she affirmed that the issues of the Arab publisher are one of the core issues that the Association has set for its new business cycle and declared the International Association’s readiness to interact with them and continue to exchange ideas and visions, in order to find out the factors of growth of the publishing sector in Arab markets and define how to allow the Arab book to reach the global markets.

Sheikha Al Qassimi also referred to the tasks of the specialized committees at the International Publishers Association and showed how publishers joined it and participated in achieving its goals, noting that the Association was established to defend publishers, unify their mission and vision and coordinate their efforts to play their roles in a proper and supportive



environment in all parts of the world.

In addition, President of Arab Publishers Association, Mohamed Rashad, considered that the first visit of Sheikha Bodour Al Qassimi, in her official capacity as President of the International Publishers Association, represented an appreciation and respect for Egypt’s position on the map of Arab and global publishing.

He appreciated the efforts exerted by Sharjah under the directions of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qassimi, Member of the Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, in caring for and supporting the book and its relevant stakeholders, pointing out that the establishment of Sharjah International Book Fair and the generous initiatives accompanying it, represented a way out for the publishing sector witnessing difficult circumstances.

# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC... ENEMY OF THE BOOK

The COVID19 pandemic, the enemy humanity is grappling with, is the enemy of the Book, too. The initial aftermaths, thus far, show that scheduled book fairs around the globe have been called off to prevent the spread of this far-from-harmless pandemic, resulting in reduced book sales by 25 to 75 % within bookshops. The pandemic has had a continued impact on the industry, yet their dire consequences, being unforeseen, are yet to be measured; reduced demands and hard copies, to name but a few.

Against the decline in book sales, demand for products and media on epidemics and catastrophic scenarios have been on the rise.

The pandemic has brought back to the fore a number of creative fiction works about epidemics and diseases and raised their sales after years have passed since their release. A case in point is the French Albert Camus's 1947 novel "La Peste" (The Plague), which tells the story of a plague that hit the Algerian town of Oran, taking the life of a large number of its inhabitants, demand for the novel has tripled, leaping into the 73<sup>rd</sup> place on online sales portal.

Jose Saramago's *Blindness* witnessed a sales boom of 180%, thereby leaping into the third place on Amazon. The novel depicts a massive unknown epidemic that sweeps across an unnamed town, breaking down the social system in place, and gives an account of the government's attempts to contain the contagion and keep order.

As far as the Arab world is concerned, with reading being far from being everyone's favorite hobby, the Arabic book industry has already been suffering from stagnation even prior the outbreak of COVID19. Nevertheless, Arab publishers, in response to the pandemic, have urged that the role of electronic platforms be activated, so that to commercialize both print and digital books and especial-



**Publishers Send Out an SOS  
Publishing Industry is  
Suffering; Supporting  
Publishers Without  
Discrimination is  
the Way Out**

By: Naser Assi

ly to facilitate their delivery so that customers won't have to leave their houses to purchase them. This would help establish new habits, hitherto overlooked, such as online shopping and reading digital books "PDF", "E-books" and the like. If such habit becomes entrenched, it will affect the activity of bookshops in the future, few as they will be, and will thus have a negative impact on the publishing industry which is already faced with numerous problems.

The COVID19 pandemic might encourage readers to rediscover their home, neighborhood, school, university and city libraries which visibly suffer from lack of salability, particularly in our Arabic world. Such circumstances will probably make us rethink books, as a major element in acquiring knowledge and rekindling flame of science, which reminds us of the poet who portrayed the book as: the best companion of all, one with which time go enjoyably, but also beneficially spent.

The cancellation of local and international book fairs since the outbreak of the Corona virus is a major challenge as book fairs lie at the heart of the Arabic book business; and short of a reliable distribution network, many Arab publishers find themselves dispersed and compelled to carry their books from one fair to another all across the region.

Well before the pandemic, the publishing industry was actually in a state of crisis, the Beirut International Arab Book Fair for instance was cancelled in 2019 due to the wave of protests that erupted across the country.

Publishing houses' crisis also dates from before the pandemic, but is now exacerbated with sales being at a complete standstill, printing and publishing being disrupted, and all book fairs being cancelled.

A number of colleagues contributed to this document, and although we received their answers after its completion and were thus unable to publish them due to time constraints, it is worth noting that all their answers were homogenous and consistent with the participants'. This validates the answers obtained and supports the recommendations proposed by publishing houses and publishers.

Participate in this Issue:

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**Sama Publishing**  
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**Dar Al Huda**  
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**Alif Ba Ta Publishing**  
Dar Al-Manhal  
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**Tamer Institute**  
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**Al Bouraq Editions**  
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Dr. Hala Hassan  
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Mohammad Al Qasimi  
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Munis Al- Khattab  
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## The Post Shutdown World

The economic consequences are strongly felt indeed, and at a time where many people are losing their jobs and lacking basic needs, how are we to arouse their interest in buying books?

Against this backdrop, we surveyed a number of children's book publishers; the latter category of books being amongst the most severely hit by the crisis due to the fact that the pandemic has completely changed children's lifestyle, especially after school shutdown, and them being confined at home; deprived from going to gardens, recreational parks, or visiting children book fairs and bookshops. The following peer publishers have been contacted:

- Asala Publishers, Shereen Kreidieh, Lebanon.
- Rabie Publishing House, Ghasan Rabie, Syria.
- Dar AlMoualef, Ali Assi, Lebanon.
- Dar Al-Manhal Publishers, Khalid Ameen, Jordan.
- The Egyptian Lebanese House, Ahmad Rashad, Egypt.
- Alif Ba Ta Publishing, Munis Al- Khattab, Jordan.
- The Arab Foundation, Al-Amal Publishing, Kitabi Foundation, Hala Hassan, Ph.D, Egypt,
- Dar Al-Fikr, Hassan Salim, Syria.
- Sama Publishing, Ahmad Salim, UAE.
- Dar Al Huda, Abdul Kareem An-Nahhass, Saudi Arabia.
- Tamer Institute, Renad Qubbaj, Palestine.
- Al Bouraq Editions, Mohammad Al Qasimi, Iraq.

It is noteworthy that responses from a large number of colleagues were received late, and so we were unable to incorporate their answers. Yet, their answers are homogenous and consistent with those obtained from the rest of publishers, which validates the information obtained. The primary question addressed to publishers was:

## What impact has COVID 19 had on your publications? And how have you been coping with the pandemic?

Dar Al-Huda: The Corona epidemic has had a severe impact on the distribution of our publications, especially on wholesale sales, which dropped by

more than 70%.

Dar AlMoualef: Undoubtedly, the Corona virus has had a global social impact on all levels, whether personal, as it has affected millions of people, or economically, as it has affected all businesses and professions without exception.

Here comes the defensive strength or backup plans for each individual, organization or institution into play. These plans are there thanks to the strength and cohesion of the sector itself, or the country's support for such or such sector. As far as publishing and distribution are concerned, the losses have certainly been quite "massive, because the publishing profession is associated with direct distribution to the recipient (the reader), and since all the sea, land and air bridges were cut between and even within countries, the repercussions have obviously been disastrous.

The Egyptian Lebanese House: believes that the publishing industry has been faced with many challenges during the last decade, starting with the Arab Spring revolutions, the war and conflict-induced closure of many markets, and the dwindling budget allocations of many institutions and agencies for the purchase of books owing to adverse economic conditions, and then comes the COVID19, which has put the final nail in the coffin of this business.

Dar Alif Ba Ta: distribution has become difficult due to the additional costs imposed by the logistical work undertaken as a result of the disruption of exhibitions. Emphasis was placed on online sale, and we have actually cut our production by 50% due to the Corona pandemic.

The Arab Foundation, Al-Amal Publishing, Kitabi Foundation: the Corona epidemic had negatively affected distribution due to postponement or can-

**Children's book publishers: We ask the federations, associations and forums concerned with the publishing sector to find solutions that limit the harm of the crisis.**





cellation of international and local fairs, which in turn took a heavy toll on sales.

**Dar El Fikr:** It goes without saying that COVID 19, the pandemic that swept across the world in early 2020, and which still rages on, has inflicted severe damage to the publishing industry. This damage has also plagued the cultural and educational climate of the country, and had its toll on publishers and employees within publishing houses. Indeed, all international and local book fairs, which are considered as the publishers' main venue to exhibit and distribute their publications, were cancelled. Book fairs are an occasion for them to secure 80 per cent of their sales. Major book fairs in the west, which used to be an outlet for promoting and translating Arabic books and reinforcing the book business as a whole, have been cancelled as well, add to it the cessation of sales movement. In light of these circumstances, it is safe to say that several publishing houses are bound to cease operating.

This was corroborated by the director of Dar Al-Manhal Publishers, Khalid Ameen.

**Sama Publishing:** the breakout of Covid 19 has had a distinct impact on the distribution of books because of the precautionary measures put in place, including leaving home only when it is absolutely necessary, which, in turn, negatively affected distribution.

**Rabie Publishing House:** the measures taken to avoid being infected by Covid 19 visibly affected the distribution of our books, thereby leading to a drop of 70 percent in our sales.

**Asala Publishers:** As a matter of fact, Covid 19 has left publishing houses at a disadvantage. All the

more as some children' book publishers cooperate directly with schools, kindergartens and public libraries. And, since these centers closed down during the pandemic, book sales dropped dramatically. Add to that, the deteriorating living situation plaguing Lebanon, which has intensified the crisis even more: most people aren't interested in books anymore. They turned their attention to securing bread, milk and other products rather than buying books or the like.

**Tamer Institute:** The epidemic has had a marked impact on the Institute's dwindling sales. Despite producing works depicting the epidemic, we have endeavored, during the last period, to make our publications reach the younger audiences, both in physical and digital formats. "Corona Diaries", which we are currently working on, is a funny educational comic, authored by Khalid Jumaa and drawn by Hanin Nazal, about the adventures of a child with his family during the lockdown. We are looking forward to make it reach a large segment of children and families upon its publication.

In 2020, Tamer Institute launched a campaign for distributing entertaining educational parcels to the families of first basic education students, first-fourth classes in 15 schools located in four directorates, namely South Hebron, North Hebron, Salfit and the suburbs of Jerusalem. Each parcel contained a collection of children stories, activity and family event book, in addition to a wide set of stationery, popular and sport games, along with a guide developed by the Institute on how to employ the stories and different gadgets in the parcel in varied family activities. The campaign sought to encourage children to interact with each other and with their families during these hard times experienced by the Palestinian



society as result of the COVID19, with the accompanying shutdown of many libraries and schools, which in turn limited children's access to stationery, and the emotional stress suffered by adults, children and their families because of home confinement and the health precautionary measures. This campaign is in line with the vision of the Ministry of Education, which stresses the importance of focusing on first basic education students and providing them with all possible interactive educational materials, so that to prevent any interruption in learning, particularly when it comes to learning literacy skills, which are the key to learning the other skills. 2800 families benefited from these parcels within the areas mentioned above, which were implemented in the end of August, 2020.

The parcels contained the COVID-game "COVID 19 Warriors". Additionally, the Institute, together with the Danish House, developed an education game on COVID19 and how to prevent it. It is basically a family game that all family members (father, mother and children) can play. The game strengthen children's leading role in combating the virus. It is meant to enhance their role as active participants in thinking about the problem and finding their way around it, encouraging scientific research by bringing laboratories closer to children, in ways that are far from being dull and boring, whereby the child acts as a combatant against the virus by protecting himself, developing vaccines and raising awareness among his friends.

Al Bouraq Editions: As we all know, the COVID19 has affected our life in general and has had an impact on all industrial, commercial and business sectors. Like all other professions, publishing came un-

der additional and unexpected pressures. Al Bouraq Editions has had its share of pressure as its sales fell to zero at the beginning of the crisis. When people started to look for solutions, Al Bouraq Editions also took the initiative to find solutions which did ease the burdens of fixed costs pertaining to rents, staff salaries and printing houses entitlements. Yet, the wound is too large to be sealed off by such solutions, for we are experiencing a real crisis, and therefore, all those involved in this vital industry must combine their efforts to keep it alive.

Mr. Abdul Karim An-Nahhas (Dar Al-Huda-Riyadh) maintains that they have addressed this pandemic by intensifying efforts with funded ads, through the media, and opening an online store [daralhuda.net](http://daralhuda.net).

As for Mr. Ahmed Rashad (the Egyptian Lebanese House-Cairo), he believes that if the post Arab Spring revolutions brought about changes in the development and movement of the publishing industry, the Corona pandemic will bring new changes to the industry once it is over; Publishers have come to the realization that there is no way they could continue operating in this industry without a digital transformation and E-Marketing, and were it not for the acumen of some publishing houses in the Arab world, many large houses would have collapsed completely.

Hala Hassan, PhD, the Arab Foundation, Al-Amal Publishing, Kitabi Foundation, believes that E-marketing and social networking sites are the only means for promoting and distributing publications. The same view was held by Ghassan Rabie (Rabie Publishing House, Syria) and asserted by Hassan Salim (Dar Al-Fikr, Syria) who stated that: "Dar



Al-Fikr has attempted to address this crisis by consolidating its orientation towards electronic publications, which must be resorted to at this stage. So, an initiative was undertaken with e-book platforms to make its books available for free to all readers during round-the-clock curfews, noting that there are currently more than 420 books on the Dar Al Fikr electronic platform. Although sales have been only modest, this step was necessary.

This view was also shared by Mr. Khalid Ameen (Dar Al-Manhal Publishers- Jordan) and Mr. Ahmad Salim (Sama Publishing, UAE).

Shereen Kreidieh (Asala Publishers, Lebanon) described the situation in the following terms:

“One of the solutions that we resorted to during the Corona crisis, with the majority of the House team being forced to work from home, is to sell our publications through social media, by displaying stories and activity books, at reasonable prices, and offering the possibility for delivery to all Lebanese lands ... But this step, albeit important, has only slightly eased the crisis, due to the deteriorating living conditions.

Mr. Ali Assi, Dar AlMoualef articulated his response as follows:

“In the beginning, there were no ready or alternative plans to address the Corona epidemic as it caught the whole world off-guard. Then, institutions quickly began to think the problem through, and found that electronic selling was the answer. Yet this, too, was thwarted by with curfew regulations, travel bans, and flight stoppages, in addition to the companies’ unwillingness to receive heavy demands that exceed their human capacity. As such, additional solutions

had to be found, i.e. E-books, which need no shipping or delivery. Yet, their sales don’t make up 10% of print sale revenues, and therefore the publishing house does not count on it this solution”.

Renad Qubbaj (Tamer Institute-Palestine) said that in light of the various ways in which this epidemic has affected society on the social and psychological level, in addition to the reduced face to face work opportunities within the institution, we began to think of alternatives appropriate to the context of our work, and ways to maintain continuous contact with society. From here came the idea of the digital library, which mainly contained (stories, activities, songs, stories).

The digital library mainly focused on creating a (societal / digital) interaction from children and different groups around the content of the library. Until the end of the year 2020, 20 stories of the Institute’s publications were completed, along with 5 puppet stories, “Dolls in Our House” collection, which features influential historical figures, and 18 activities, interactive songs and children’s participations, 17 stories from the Tell Me Project, and 5 children’s songs.

The view rate for this content reached nearly 200,000 views per story, and nearly 1,500 interactions per story, on average. Regarding response to the Corona epidemic, Muhammad Al Qasimi PhD states that “we decided to stop all printing activities in order prevent incurring additional financial burdens that increase the immersion uncontrollable costs and entitlements. Yet this is not feasible because the reader is always looking forward for new publications, and if cutbacks persist, the Institute may end up disappearing from the publishing panorama, which would make the reader or follower look for alterna-



Shereen Kreidieh



Dr. Hala Hassan



Abdul Kareem Al-Nahhas

tive publishers. That being said, we began planning for producing and publishing a limited number of the necessary books and intellectual games that the reader needs in order to keep the communication movement with readers and distributors going.

### ▶ **What is the practical plan you have been following to keep operating and releasing publications?**

“We kept operating and releasing publications through our own offices and thanks to employees, administrators and designers’ remote work home for”, Mr. Abdul Kareem An-Nahhas stated.

Ahmad Rashad reiterated his plan stating that: “as an institution, this was the solution we resorted to during the first stage of the pandemic, especially following shutdown of libraries where we launched several marketing campaigns to buy printed books through our social media pages and website. We also contacted many sited and social media pages to introduce and market our publications. We also reviewed all our publications that were not released electronically, worked on them and distributed them on many platforms.

The same plan was adopted by The Arab Foundation, Al-Amal Publishing, Kitabi Foundation as Hala Hanan. PhD stated that they proceeded through advertising and marketing, as well as exhibiting their works on social media and virtual libraries’ apps.

This was asserted by Mr. Khaled Ameen ,Ahmad Salim and Ghassan Rabie. This latter stated: “ Strategic projects have been postponed for the market recovery phase”.

Shereen Kreidieh put it this way: “As for the follow-up of work and publication of books, at the beginning of the Corona crisis, and during the period of complete closure, we had to notify authors and

writers that we are waiting on receiving new texts, because we were working on old ones, and printing presses are closed in their entirety, and that we had no clue as to when the country would be reopening again ... With the gradual re-opening, the work team returned to working in the office, receiving texts again, and completing work on the old texts to get them published.

Mr. Ali Assi replied that it was necessary for each publishing house to find alternative plans with which they would continue operating in the publishing business without being disconnected from their readers and customers at large.

There were new agreements with libraries and distributors to sell books, “either physically or electronically. ”, to open new markets with new distributors in new regions of the Arab Gulf states, and try to deliver books to them without any obstacles, and shipping specific quantities of best-selling books to some countries for storage, so that they are available and deliverable whenever you order them. This made some distributors all the more enthusiastic to get their hands on these books since they are easily deliverable in the country in which they live, which made them intensify advertising through their platforms to sell them.

Renad Qubbaj stated: “over the last period, particularly during the total shutdown, We, at Tamer Institute, have tried to to follow up from home with all relevant parties as much as possible, including writers, painters, designers and printers, and we were in constant contact with writers and painters, and held a series of meetings via Zoom to discuss the work and exchange ideas and suggestions. The hardest challenge was to complete the work with the printing press for the final process of designing the description of the book, as disruption and quarantine delayed the stage of printing and publishing the book.

Muhammad Al-Qasimi stated that the publishing

crisis in the Arab world is twofold; with paper-based publishing movement being greatly decreased, there don't seem to be any market for digital book appears either; printed book are still the rule for readers in the Arab world although digital books are more suitable for the Arab reader because they are cheaper and more accessible compared to paper books. On the one hand, the lack of electronic publishing stores in the Arab world did not open the way for the Arab publisher to sell their electronic publications while ensuring the preservation of the copyrights of authors and publishers to make up for the shortage of paper book sales.

### How have your relationship with schools been?

Professor Abdul-Karim an-Nahhas tated, "Unfortunately, the response of schools was weak, except for some individual efforts made by some teachers to directing students to read and acquire stories.

Mr. Ahmad Rashad believes that publisher-teacher communication was virtually non-existent due to the total lockdowns, and that even after opening up, all cooperative projects with school libraries were on hold during the year 2020 AD - 2021 AD. Consequently, the number of our publications was down 50 % as we published only 45 titles on different themes and destined for different age groups and despite all of that, the institution has still been publishing new books.

### Have you gone digital? And what results has this transformation yielded?

Mr. Abdul Kareem replied that they haven't yet moved to digital publishing.

Dr. Hala Hassan answered: yes, the results have been fairly positive, yet they cannot make up for the cancellation of local and international fairs. Mr. Khaled Ameen and Ahmad Salim were of the same opinion.

Gassan Rabie, on the other hand, stated that they haven't moved to digital publishing yet. Shereen Kreidieh observed: Asala Publishers have many digital publications already, and their e-books- before the Corona crisis- are available on the major Arabic and world digital book platforms.

Ali Assi's answer was: At Dar AlMoualef, we produce e-books since before the outbreak of the pandemic, but only specific publications and at customers' request which do not constitute a large



proportion compared to the paper books we publish. It is unfortunate that the Arab reader has become used to getting e-books almost free of charge because e-book culture is unclear and has no laws in the Arab world. What is more, many people have used the Corona crisis to counterfeit books and print them in small quantities in several countries under the pretext of not being able to ship them from the exporter due to the closure of borders. Having said that, the previous period was, and still is the peak of illegal and unconstitutional book piracy. Those engaged in piracy have taken advantage of the fact that Arab unions and governments are busy addressing the Corona virus and its aftermaths.

Renad Qubbaj's answered: This period was a real opportunity for the Institute to go into the issue of designing electronic activities and converting a group of paper stories into animated stories within the animated audio-visual library project, which is still under development to this moment. As for activities, we propose a wide array of activities ranging from children songs that lightly depicts the lockdown, and are meant to consolidate family ties and bring to the attention of children and parents the possibility of re-exploring their home and their surroundings in new and different ways, to interactive activities that encourage children to showcase their skills and works, to presenting a series of stories told by Palestinian storytellers within the "Tell a Story" project. The number of views on Tamer's official Facebook page indicates the success these releases as they have garnered a lot of engagement from the audience.

Educate your children  
Prevention and  
dealing with Corona  
virus through books  
and reading.

### How many publications have you released over the last period?

Mr. Abdul Kareem An-Nahhas asserted that with the special conditions we are going through in mind,



the number of our publications, which is almost 40, is fairly good.

Dr. Hala Hassan believes that Corona has led to a fall in profits and revenues causing a shortage of liquidity and necessary materials, which in turn massively affected the production plan.

Khalid Ameen stated that paper-based publications are very few, and more focus is placed on marketing digital publications on the electronic store.

Ghassan Rabie mentioned that he hasn't published any works.

Shereen Kreidieh answered: publications over the last period went down 25 10%.

Mr. Ali Assi regretted that their publications over the last period were few due to the lack of a market and readership. This period may be described as a period of stagnation and preparation projects for the period to come.

Tamer Institute, according to Renad Rubbaj published 12 books.

### What recommendations do you propose to cope with this crisis?

Mr. Abdul Karim An-Nahas requested the support of children's book publishers by the relevant official bodies, such as the Sharjah Book Authority's Arab Forum for Publishers of Children's Book -. By purchasing quantities of publishers' works to enable them to pursue their enlightening mission, and to ultimately establish a private company for members of the Forum to undertake the distribution of members' publications.

As for Dr. Halahsen, she demanded that there be local and international support for publishing and publishers' movement so that these latter publish-



ers can navigate through this fateful battle through governments, cultural organizations, and local and international exhibitions departments.

Hassan Salim called for attention to public, neighborhood, school, university, and private libraries, and suggested that censorship measures in the world be eased, noting that in a globalized world, distribution mechanisms must be put in place, whereby publishers do not have to rely only on Arab and regional exhibitions, but rather look for solutions that facilitate fair participation.

Mr. Ahmed Salem called for organizing and promoting more activities and creating a children's book electronic platform that brings together most publishing houses interested in children's books.

As for Ghassan Rabie, he called for support and guidance from the Arab Publishers Union and local unions.

Shereen Kreidieh proposed solutions that involved the sector as a whole, she hopes that those responsible for the sector, including federations, unions and forums to do their utmost to ease the crisis. In the publishing sector, we are ready to help publishing sector unions, federations and forums to come up with solutions to the crisis by organizing fairs whereby Corona preventive measures are adhered to, and in line with the measures put in place by the hosting countries. In this context, we propose to follow the example of Sharjah's last fair, and providing visa, mobility and visit facilitations for our representatives. We also call on Arab states to purchase books and organize the Arab Reading Challenge Project as a project to be emulated.

She also called on publishing federations, unions and forums to be constantly be in contact with publishers to remain updated.

Ali Assi stated that the crisis has had an emotional and financial impact on every Arab publisher, yet

**Support is not only with money or buying books, but it should be through a new projects and plans represented by partnerships between publishers**



this time, the impact is felt at full force, there may be different publishing and distribution methods in the future, I daresay that the very concept of publishing will change. Since publishing is the pillar upon which the society is built, the competent authorities and decision makers have to lend their full support to the sector. Support goes beyond just financing and purchasing books, this time, new projects and plans with a different structural basis should be developed, including partnerships with publishers, supporting and supporting the exchange of rights between countries in simpler and faster ways, and supplying classroom libraries for the upcoming period, in addition to increasing the number of cultural initiatives and prizes, and increasing their budget allocations to include a wider range of publishers. It is also recommended that a new project be developed, whose purpose is to enrich the books shelves within the houses of students and intellectuals, such as associations, social centers and literature clubs. This would be a win-win opportunity and create a beneficial movement between publishers and these parties, whether individuals or authorities.

He added, we can face this pandemic only through collective work and the genuine initiatives that are far-reaching, encompassing everyone without exception, and not only involving particular parties chosen from amongst hundreds or thousands of others. Efforts in the future should be combined, otherwise, there is no need for them in the first place.

Renad Kabbaj believed that in order for publishing houses to reach the largest number of children and adolescents in Palestine, we hope that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture support publishing houses by contributing to the process of distributing books to schools, and thinking about including some of these publications within the school curriculum and school activities, and providing them consistently. We believe that this matter is of great importance in encouraging the child's interest in reading, because one of the major challenges we are currently facing is boosting motivation to read and self-learning away from the indoctrinating instruction which has always been associated with the term "learning" especially when we consider that most children spend their time playing video games.



What Mr. Muhammad Al Qasimi thinks that every project owner must search for solutions commensurate with the size of his project in order to overcome this crisis and other crises with minimal losses and continue operating despite the difficulties and obstacles that face them, because publishing is of utmost importance as it is the moral and cognitive food for every human being in all the stages of his life.

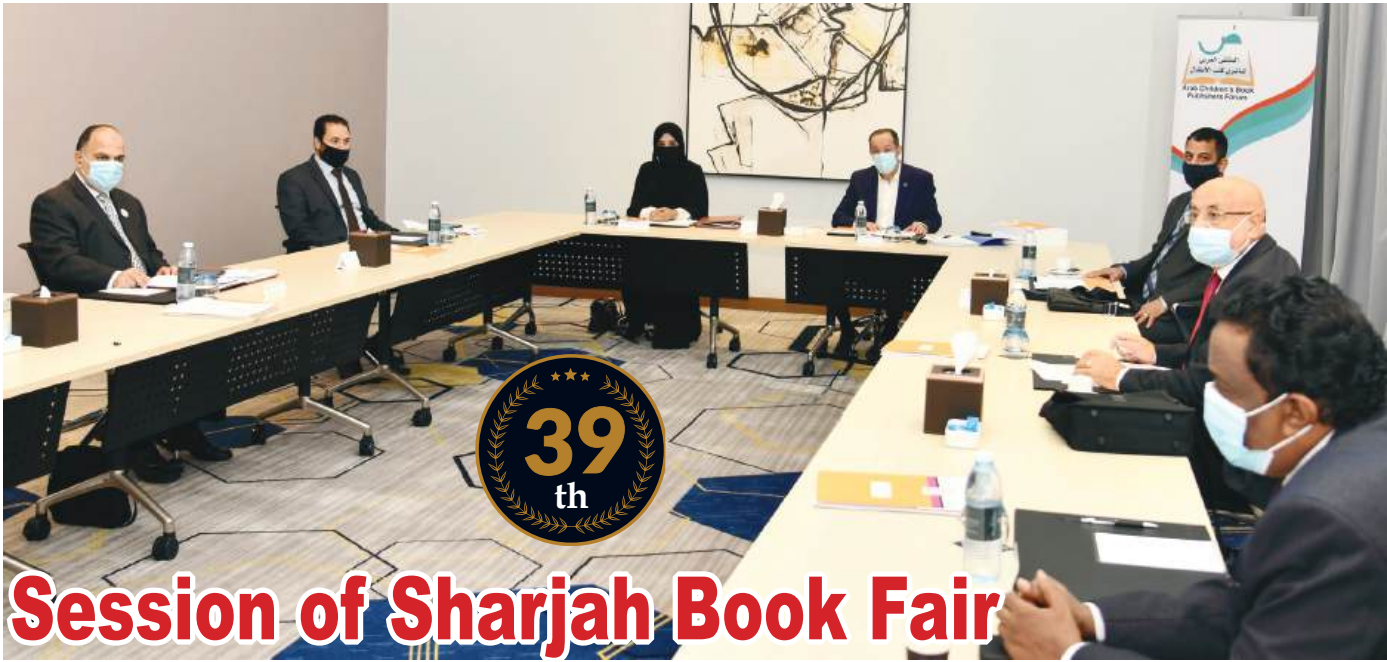
It is imperative that efforts be joined by everyone, especially those concerned with the decision to facilitate the delivery of this food to every human being, wherever he is, and governments should pay attention to this issue as an important humanitarian issue and the obstacles before them must be removed in order for the wheel of culture, education and culture in a way consistent with its importance.

- Children's books Publishers: We call on the unions, associations and forums concerned with the publishing sector to find solutions to prevent the impact of the crisis.

- Educate your children to prevent themselves and deal with the Coronavirus through books and reading.

-Support is not only through money or the purchase of books, it can also be through new projects and plans involving partnerships with publishers.





# Session of Sharjah Book Fair A Session with a Different Taste

**The 39<sup>th</sup> session of the Sharjah Book Fair is an exceptional session that fulfilled the requirements of preventive precautionary measures under the direct supervision of the fair management, as it received a good response from all participants, including publishers and visitors.**

The grant of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of Federal Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, to support participating publishers, either by purchasing books or exempting from pavilion fees,

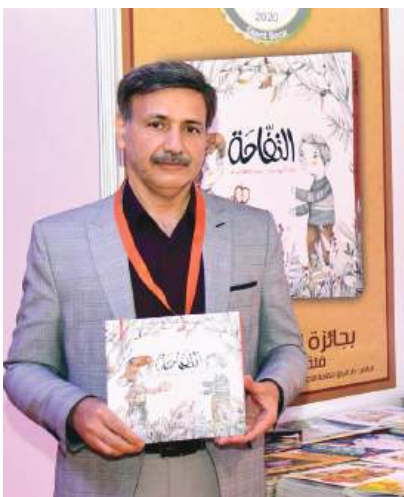
played a major role in encouraging publishers.

Chairman of the Forum, Mr. Nasser Assi and the Secretary General, Ms. Aisha Hamad Meghawer, sent a letter of thanks and appreciation on behalf of all members of the Forum to His Highness, Ruler of Sharjah, for his generous grant that had a great impact on the publishers and encouraged them and for the appreciation of Sharjah and its ruler, may Allah protect him.

Within the framework of the distinguished participation of Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum in the fair, the Chairman of the Fo-

rum, Secretary General, members of the Board and the Office of the General Secretariat were keen on being constantly present at the pavilion of the Forum, which was visited by dozens of publishers, including members, writers, media professionals and publishers who submitted applications for membership of the Forum.

- Sharjah TV conducted a media interview with Mr. Nasser Assi, Chairman of the Forum, in which he addressed the specificity of this session of Sharjah Fair, in terms of challenging the circumstances, good organization and taking the necessary precautionary measures





Saleha Obeid Ghabesh



Muhammad Shaaban



Muhammad Saad

to preserve the safety and health of visitors. He also tackled the Forum's role in developing the child's book, in terms of content, the remaining details and generous support the Forum receives from His Highness Ruler of Sharjah. At the end of the interview, Mr. Nasser talked about the continuous development of the Forum membership.

Vice-Chairman, Ashraf Shaheen, had also a field TV interview at the Forum's pavilion, in which he shed light on the Forum's goals, its various activities and tireless endeavor to serve and support children's book publishers. He also provided an explanation of the objectives of the Forum Award and the details of the nomination.

- During the fair, the General Secretariat distributed and provided all members at their pavilions with Publishers Guide of 2020 and an introductory leaflet about the terms and details of the Forum Award in its new (eighth) session, along with the new issue of Al-Multaqa Magazine issued in November 2020. In addition, brochures were distributed among all the pavilions participating in the fair.

- On the sidelines of the fair, a meeting of the Board of the Forum was held, in which the Board discussed many matters of interest to the members.

- During the fair days, a member of the jury for Forum Award of 2020, Ms. Saleha Obeid Ghabesh,

was honored. In addition, the trophy of Forum Award was granted to Mr. Muhammad Shaaban - Sinbad Publishing House, as a representative of the winner of the best illustration category, Mr. Ali Al-Zaini, as well as Mr. Muhammad Saad - Nour Al Maaref Publishing House, as a representative of the winner of the category of the best text, Mr. Muhammad Al-Aqous, as they could not come to the UAE.

It is noteworthy that Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum has extended thanks and appreciation to the management of the Sharjah Book Authority, which exerted tremendous efforts for the success of this important session of Sharjah International Book Fair and the service of publishers.





# The Winners of the Best Children's Book Award Eighth Session 2021



The Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum announced the winners of the Best Children's Book Award for the eighth session / 2021. The winners as per the decision of the jury, are some of outstanding works that met the criteria of the award, namely:

## 1st Children's Books Category (Age under 12 years)

The book titled **(الذي طارت منه الكلمات)** (From which the words flew), the publisher: Nour Al Maarif for Publishing and Distribution / Egypt, the writer Muhannad Al-Aqous, and the illustrations by Dr. Amira Al Tababi.



## 2nd Books for Young People (12-16 years)

The book **(الملكة سهيلة)** (Queen Suhaila), Publisher: Nahdet Misr Publishing House, the writer Rania Hussein Amin.



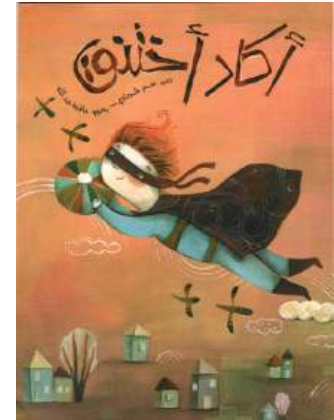
## 3rd Best Text Category

The book **(أكاد أختنق)** (Almost Choking), The Writer Sahar Shehadi, and the illustrations by Atif Abdullah, the publisher: Nour Al Maarif House for Publishing / Egypt.



## 4th Best Illustration Category

The book **(أمل)** (Amal), the painter: Haya Halaw, the writer: Amal Nasser, and the publisher: Dar Hikayat Qamar for publishing and distribution / Saudi Arabia.



On this occasion, the President of the Forum, His Excellency Mr. Nasser Asi, and the members of the Board of Directors of the Forum, extended their congratulations and praises to the winners, wishing them to keep on excelling and succeeding, along with their best wishes to all members of the Forum.

Professor Aisha Hamad Maghawour, Secretary General of the Arab Forum of Children's Book Publishers, chairman of the award committee, also expressed delight at this achievement and distinction, while noting that the Forum's award for the best children's book is meant to develop the children's book and prompt publishers to come up with the best, something that helps to engage children to have a

sense of book companionship, and to build up their reading skills.

The jury of the award has wrapped up its work over the past few days to judge the competing works in the eighth session of the Arab Forum of Children's Book Publishers Award for the best children's book throughout an array of assessment criteria for this Award that is intended to aid in promoting the creative output of the publishing houses of the forum's members, and the enhancement of their contributions to the areas of Arab children's book publishing.

## Dar Al Saqi

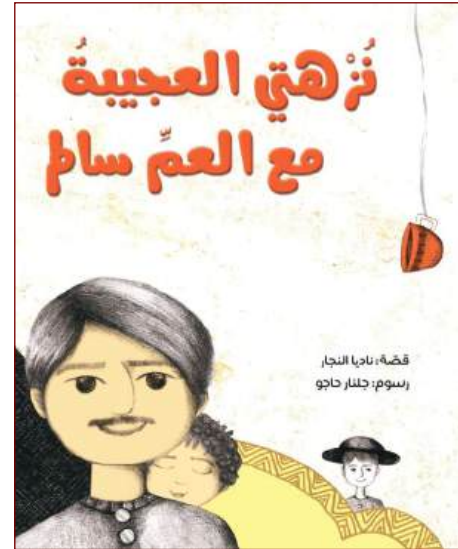
### Granted Abdulaziz Al Mansour Award in its second session of 2020

The family of Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum congratulates the colleagues at Dar Al Saqi - Lebanon for being granted the Award of Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Mansour in its second session of 2020 for the story entitled, "My Wonderful Walk with Uncle Salem", written by Nadia Al-Najjar and illustrated by Julnar Hajo.

The value of this award is Ten Thousand US Dollar. It was established by the Kuwaiti publisher, Dr. Abdulaziz Al

Mansour, founder of the Kuwaiti Library (That Al Salasil) around fifty years ago, until today it has become one of the most famous Arab publishing houses, due to providing the publishing world with thousands of publications in various sciences and knowledge.

Best wishes for (Dar Al Saqi) in Lebanon and Kuwaiti Library (That Al Salasil), and both of them are members of Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum.



## New works of Sadikat Publishing and Distribution House

Sadikat Publishing and Distribution House opened a library to display and present the books issued by the House in Maysaloon area in the Emirate of Sharjah. The library contains stationery and office services.

Ms. Saleha Ghabesh, the Owner of the House, stated that the aim of establishing this small library is to provide a realistic platform for displaying books, which would contribute to easy acquisition of the books to encourage reading, especially for children and adolescents. She also indicated that the library will develop its work during the post-construction period, as it will be provided with some educational and knowledge resources and it will present services in teaching reading and writing, in addition to allocating new books issued and published by the House.



## A new group of publishing houses joins the members of the forum

The Board of Arab Children’s Book Publishers Forum approved the membership applications submitted by publishing houses, as the General Secretariat of the Forum wished all the best for them, and they are:



الملتقى العربي لنشري كتب الأطفال  
Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum

Publishing House	State	Director / Authorized Representative for the Forum’s affairs
Loaloo Publishing House	United Arab Emirates	Ahmed Al-Sayed
Hekayet Qamar Library	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Hajar Al Tarouti
Al-Alia Publishing House	Arab Republic of Egypt	Weam Abdul Latif
Snouno Publishing House	Scotland	Fedaa Shetia
Raheeq Al Kotob	Arab Republic of Egypt	Adel Abdul Sameea
Al Manhal Publishing House	United Arab Emirates	Abdul Raouf Kaddour

## Members of Arab Children’s Book Publishers FORUM WERE HONORED AND HAD GOOD PERFORMANCE IN ETISALAT AWARD 2020



The Forum’s family warmly congratulates the winning colleagues of Etisalat Award categories in its 12<sup>th</sup> session, namely:



**Children’s Book of the Year Award** for the book entitled “**Nights of Shah-rzizi: a story in a story within a story**”, written by Hadeel Ghunaim, illustrated by Sahar Abdullah and published by:

“Al Balsam Publishing House”, Egypt.



**“Best Silent Book” Category Award** for the book entitled “**The Apple**”, illustrated by Atifah Abdullah, idea presented by Asmaa Emara and published by:

“Al Buraq House for Children’s Culture”, Iraq.



**Young People’s Book of the Year Award** for the book entitled “**Shaqaeq Al Numan**”, written by Haya Saleh and published by:

“Al Yasmine Publishing and Distribution House”, Jordan.



**Best Illustration Award** for the book entitled “**I and the Beast**”, written by Aisha Abdullah Al Harithi, illustrated by Baraa Al Awer and published by:

“Ashgar Publishing and Distribution House”, UAE.

# Masabeeh Publications for Child's Book

Masabeeh Publications for Child's Book is an Iraqi publishing house specialized in children's books in Baghdad. It was established in March 2019 and published in its annual plans more than 30 different story books in children's literature. It is the output of the development of "Come and Write in Baghdad" project and "Marathon of Writing" initiative launched by the Iraqi poet and storyteller, Qassem Saudi, who won the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2009 in children's literature, for his children's story collection "The Dirham That Was Singing" and "Come and Write in Baghdad" project, which is a free volunteer project intended to teach primary school pupils to write a short story for a child. From this standpoint, the idea for establishing a house specialized in children's literature in Baghdad has arisen, due to the country's need to create a child's book and approach these aesthetic, cognitive and civilizational worlds.

### Why is it called "Masabeeh" (Lamps)?

The child is the core essence of the entire world and the only boat of hope in spite of the cruelty of this planet, so we, at Masabeeh Publications for Child's Book in Baghdad, are working hard to produce stories that make the child proud of himself and allow him to love his family and society. We may fail



in this case and we may succeed, but the important thing is to try to present some narrative outputs for these critical and mysterious times that would put burdens on the family, the individual and society everywhere in the world. Soon in 2021, we would release some other good books. Maybe we are slow in the publishing process, but we have hope in spite of all the challenges and crises in making a child book fit for a child.

### "For love of child's book"

"For love of child's book" is the first slogan of Masabeeh Publications. It is created for the sake of a child who wants to see his dreams in a book. Hence, Masabeeh Publications, which is an Iraqi publishing house established in Al Mutanabi Street in Baghdad, aims at seeing children's books at every home, school and library. It represents a small branch trying to bear the fruits of knowledge, enlightenment and beauty in the courageous and creative Arab childhood tree in spite of everything. In order to enrich the Iraqi and Arab library with more tales and stories, Masabeeh Publications opened its doors for a number of narrators and writers in the GCC area, including Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Then, it works hard to promote the children's book industry in Iraq and then it would move to Arab Book Fairs. Masabeeh Publications for Child's Book participated in Sharjah International Book Fair for two consecutive sessions "2019 and 2020",



Muscat International Book Fair 2020 and Iraq International Book Fair 2020.

### Initiatives of Masabeeh Publications

As part of its vision dedicated for enhancing the role of reading and writing related to children's literature, Masabeeh Publications for Child's Book launched a number of reading initiatives, events and various cultural activities, including "Spirit of Baghdad" event, which included a collective signing ceremony for eight creative persons from Iraq and granting more than 200 storybooks to children and families from the visitors of Iraq International Book Fair. Then, we will launch "Sharjah Reads from Baghdad" initiative at Sharjah Children's Reading Festival, which includes distributing a number of free stories among the visitors of the Fair. In addition, we will launch other initiatives and events; including field writing workshops and writing marathon initiative that would contain special workshops for talented primary school pupils, as well as scientific university students.

# A review of the winning books of the Award of Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum of 2020

## A shift in Text and Illustrations

The boom in the children's book publishing sector in the Arab world is accompanied by flourishing in children's book awards, which inevitably leads to the development of the children's literature sector.

Accordingly, the Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum's Award was launched, which proves year after year that it is on the right path, in terms of the nomination mechanism, intensive meetings of the jury (each year the jury is changed), the discussion of the nominated books and the election of the winning books. I had the honor to participate in the jury at one session and closely examined the course of matters, which increased my encouragement for this award and my belief in its goals.

Last year, the whole world was preoccupied with "COVID-19" pandemic, due to its utmost importance and effect on our health and life. While the consequences of this pandemic were affecting the Arab and international publishing sector, including the cancellation of fairs and closure of schools and the almost total suspension of the book market, Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum was exerting strenuous efforts to alleviate these burdens, through several steps, most notably the organization of the Forum's Award of 2020, despite all the circumstances.

Indeed, the Forum has proven the validity of its objectives, as the Award was organized and the nominated books were examined according to an innovative remote meeting mechanism, so it achieved the first steps of success and decided not to go back and leave despair.

As for the winning books of the 2020 session of the Award, they were various according to the categories presented, but their main joint feature is that the texts, regardless of their differences, recorded a qualitative leap this year, so that the illustrations complement the goal, whereas the Arab child was the biggest winner.

The following is a review of the winning books and simple attempts to talk about them:



### "Me and He"...

The winning book entitled, "Me and He", was published in its first edition by "Dar Al Yasmine Publishing and Distribution" - Jordan; the text is written by Maria Daadoush and the illustrations are done by Walid Taher.

The book sheds light on a number of gentle behaviors that can accommodate an hour of play between the heroine of the story and her friend "Samer".

It also shows a number of unpleasant behaviors for the younger reader.

In terms of output, the book is very distinctive and the quality of the paper used is of high quality. As for the size of the book, it represents one of the good sizes for children of this age, as it can be shared with parents or the reader.

The illustrations are of high quality and there is an emphasis on the primary colors: yellow, blue and red, as they are used to link the characters with objects in the story and help us focus on some things.

As usual, the illustrator, Walid Taher, demonstrates his power by using clear pictures and through the use of colour. For example: the boy's love of blue for his stuff (glasses); the girl's hair is red; this color also appears in her objects; and the color was used to highlight (thank you) word or a smiley face.

Sizes: The characters in the book have the same size on most pages except when there is a disagreement between the two main characters of the book. There is a diminution of the characters when they are sad, or when their place on the page is lower or farther. Example: p.10 and 14.

It is also worth noting that the design is seamless and creative inside the book cover, which denotes lines and circles.

The idea of the book is beautiful. The text is simple and gives the child a space to think about the results of his actions in a funny way. It has been noted that the text includes some difficult words for this age stage, like: it was kidnapped, taken back, confiscated... but the pictures would help in understanding them.



### "What is in My Head?"... The best text

Once again, the author, Muhannad Al-Aqous, takes us on a journey of imagination, speaking as a child, through the main character in the book entitled, "What is in My Head?"

It was published by "Dar Noor Al Maarif Publishing and Distribution" - Arab Republic of Egypt in 2018.

The text entitled in the form of a question, takes us with the protagonist or the hero to imagine what might be in his head, which would open the door of imagination

**Dr. Sherine Kreidieh**  
**Researcher and University Professor of Children's**  
**Literature, Director General of "Asala House for**  
**Publishing and Distribution" – Lebanon**



for children, according to a favorable pattern that pushes the reader to every page and every dialogue between the hero and one of his family members or acquaintances, so as to find out what is in his head.

If the illustrations are simple, favorable and have a direct focus on the head, then the text contains some difficult words and phrases, for example: oppose him, stop, had in my mind, with insistence, hid, and artificial...

Another point is that the text focused on the boy's difference from others and did not mention points of similarity with his mates, especially on page 5, where everyone mocked him.



**"Adnan and Ramadan Plate" ... The best illustrations**

It is a very wonderful book issued in its first edition in 2019 by "Dar Al Yasmine Publishing and Distribution" – Jordan. The text is by Haya Saleh and the illustrations are done by the distinguished

illustrator, Ali Al-Zaini.

The text is simple and interesting. It addresses the holy month of Ramadan, with the meanings of compassion, goodness and generosity it has. "Adnan", the hero of the story, decides to fast the holy month. On the first day, due to his young age, he was extremely thirsty and hungry, and wished that his mother would cook his favorite food, but, unfortunately for "Adnan", the mother prepared a meal he did not like at all ... So what happened?

In terms of the text, it is no less important than the illustrations that are full of details of the holy month of Ramadan. This was evident in the most brilliant form in the full picture that occupied pages 5 and 6, which did not contain any sentence related to the text. It focused on the atmosphere of the holy month and its impact on the street, market and people's lives.

The joyful colors also matched the expressions of the characters' faces and their movements. These characters were brilliantly shown by Al-Zaini as Arabic persons, just as he showed the houses and customs.

The text, which contained imagination, opened the door wide for creative illustrations, as we see, on one page, "Adnan" while he was swimming in molokhia.

It is a very wonderful book and it is the best proof of showing the importance of pictures and illustrations in the children's literature.



**"Red Snake" ... A Book for Adolescents**

It is a beautiful book for young people, which was issued by "Noon Books" - Canada in 2019. It is written by the author, Mays Dagher and the illustrations are done by Omar Lafi.

It is the story of the boy "Adam" who lives in a refugee camp and asylum becomes the main focus of the story. "Adam" builds a model of a house or school from pieces of cardboard and stones in the narrow space between the white tents, but "Adam" was not playing, but he has hope and pain.

Near the refugee camp, there is a giant river with red water, like a snake that is said to kidnap people and stones and steal dreams. The events of the story accelerate and "Adam" is disappointed, but the people of the camp stand near him, alleviating his pain and making him believe in hope.

The author, by her brilliant narration and writing, managed to embody the camp with all its details, chaos, pains, hopes, river and tents, as if it exists before the reader.

She has also excelled at displaying emotions in various ways and different manners.

As for the illustrations that decorated the book, they helped the writer in her mission, as the colored page between all chapters represents only a space for the words and smooth sentences, which are presented in a simple and uncomplicated language. The lesser use of color assisted in the comprehension of emotions. In addition, the use of red colour also denotes fear and the river represents the dangers surrounding the refugees.

The issue of refugees and use of art to highlight it is not new in this domain. Many books that were granted awards in the past 10 years tackled the suffering of refugee children.

Finally, the question is: What does the Arab teenager want to read?

**The forum proved its objectives, the award was organized, and the nominated books were discussed according to an innovative mechanism**

## Mr. Haitham Muwaffaq Hafez - Dar Al Hafez

# We Largely Succeeded, and Fulfilled Some of our Hopes

Dar Al Hafez is considered one of the active institutions based on its presence in the Syrian and Arab publishing area, since it was launched more than a quarter of a century ago in Damascus. There is a large diversity in the activity of Dar Al Hafez between printing, production, publishing and distribution. It is also a founding member of "Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum" since its establishment in 2009.



In this respect, we are pleased to host the master and founder of this publishing house, who is the well-known publisher, Mr. Haitham Al Hafez, President of Syrian Publishers Association, who answers a number of questions that were presented by "Al Multaqa" magazine through the following dialogue:

### **Please give us an idea about the beginning of Dar Al Hafez?**

The idea of Dar Al Hafez has arisen from the urgent need to find a publishing house specialized in products dedicated for children to provide all aspects of distinct and useful content for them and advance the mind and culture of the Arab child. Dar Al Hafez was keen on maintaining creativity in all its publications through careful attention to the content, in terms of the quality of the text, the aesthetics of the language, the splendor of children's illustrations and the elegance of printing, in order to provide the Arab child with a distinct visual vision and reach his mind and heart wherever he is in all parts of the Arab world and the entire world.

Dar Al Hafez produced more than 2000 publications distributed between paper and electronic publishing.

Our publications were greatly liked by the Arab community, especially the songs that became popular among the children of the Arab Levant and Maghreb. We could not have achieved this success without the grace of Allah. We tirelessly attempted to establish a distinguished industry for children's books and

we have certainly succeeded to a large extent and achieved some of our hopes and aspirations. We hope in the coming days that the publishing industry will be developed in the Arab world more than it is now, so as to present the best and keep pace with the printing development in the world.

### **When did you start publishing targeted at children?**

We started specialized publishing in the field of children in 1998, when we published the first series directed at children, and because of the public's demand for obtaining our publication, we produced successive collections, which had a great resonance in the market, after which our publications followed in an incremental and progressive manner. Today, Dar Al Hafez is no longer alone, as we have now affiliated institutions, such as Young Scholars Institution that is concerned with educational tools and games for children; Panorama Institution which is specialized in books and novels for young people and adolescents; and House of Wisdom specialized in serving the Holy Quran. We will continuously strive to expand the field of publishing.

Very soon, we will have a major Syrian institution whose goal is to produce and market educational games dedicated for children to keep pace with the major production companies in the world, wishing to cooperate with the leading Arab companies in this field, in order to provide the child with an educational visual vision, along with fun, benefit and playing.

### **What are your criteria for choosing your children's publications?**

We have writing and publishing committee composed of a group of specialists, who have experience in this field and have high standards to select the best, in line with the policy of the house and the market need, and most importantly, what suits the child. This committee is not tasked with choosing the material only, but also studying every word, expression and illustration to present the child's book in the best form.

We would thank many Arab writers whose important creative products joined our wonderful publications list, including the great Syrian poet, Suleiman Al-Issa, the great author, Lina Kilani, the sophisticated writer, Muhannad Al-Aqous, the Omani writer, Wafaa Al-Shamsi, the beloved Jordanian writer, Dr. Fadia Daas, the Kuwaiti writer, Amal Al-Randi, as well as the Lebanese writer, Sahar Shehadeh and the famous Lebanese writer, Dr. Tariq Al-Bakri. Certainly, we have many great Arab writers who contributed with us to enriching the Arab library and we hope to present more distinguished works for the Arab child in the coming days, through which we can meet his scientific and educational needs, along with providing fun and benefit.

### **How do you see the desire of children in Syria in particular, and the Arab world in general, to obtain a paper book and read in general?**

Despite the war that we are living in, there is a good demand for our publications in Syria and we have to mention that each environment and society has special standards, as Dar

Al Hafez tries to get acquainted with all these criteria to satisfy everyone in the Arab world. In addition, the Arab market, in general, was growing exponentially until the beginning of the Corona pandemic, as the market was greatly affected by this pandemic.

However, I hopefully believe that the Arab book market will recover and flourish again, will have new and creative Arab products and will move achieve progress. Moreover, we are not afraid of the decline of the Arab book market because it is a temporary retreat and the publishing industry will return to the Arab forefront, and this is very close, Allah willing.

**What is your assessment of the publishing movement in Syria?**

There is an incremental growth in the publishing movement in Syria, as the number of publishing houses has recently doubled in Syria, and many of their publications reached Arab countries and the entire world as well. They made great strides in the publishing market despite the conditions that Syria was suffering from during the ten years of war.

The new law regulating publishing houses also contributed to the development of their work, but rather strengthened their Arab presence and provided incentives for distinguished products. We all hope that the Syrian market will recover and return to its normal status before the start of the unjust war that the Syrian society is suffering from. I hope that security and safety will prevail in our dear country, Syria, and that all economic and cultural sanctions and obstacles that hinder the Syrian publishing movement will be removed. Indeed, I hope that Syria will return to the Arab forefront and we will find many book fairs in Syrian cities soon. We hope that these fairs will be visited by our Arab brothers from all parts of the Arab world, as they did before, and we wish that they could enjoy aesthetic and cultural tourism. This is not far away as long as hope embraces work.

**We note your interest in international fairs, so what is the idea of this interest?**

Participation in international fairs is an important aspect for the Syrian publisher and we have many crea-

tive ideas and products that we want to share with the world. It also represents an important opportunity to sell publishing rights for some books, buy publishing rights for suitable books for our children and enhance the cultural and intellectual exchange for Arab publishers and even foreigners.

Arab fairs are also considered a gateway for the writer and publisher, and we are also establishing local fairs in every city, wishing to see book fairs soon in every Arab city in our homeland, so that every Arab child can visit the book fair in his city.

**Do you consider book fairs alone sufficient to introduce the publisher?**

The successful publisher must be present in the fairs and in the local, Arab and international markets, and any default in any of these areas will negatively affect his presence and share in the publishing market.

Fairs are not sufficient only now for the delivery of the book to the reader, but rather we wish that Arab publishers could pay attention to electronic marketing of the book and this is a new feature that will be added to Arab markets.

**What are your aspects of criticism for the Arab book fairs?**

Fairs need continuous development in order to keep pace with advancement and cope with the development witnessed by the world around us. There are many fairs that follow this approach, in terms of development, interest and diversification in activities and events.

I wish that these fairs could keep pace with the fairs industry in the world, pay attention to the media aspect of their fairs and seek renewal and development, so that these fairs can become a gateway to the development of the Arab publishing industry. We have managed to achieve our aspirations with the assistance of some Arab fairs, but we hope to see more in the coming days.

We seek through our products to provide the community with everything it needs and try to permanently develop and modernize our products intended for our children, in terms of scientific, psychological and educa-

tional aspects, so our goal is to provide them with fun, benefit, science and knowledge through the simplest and easiest visual and educational methods and means to fulfill what our children want.

**In your opinion, what are the most prominent problems faced by the Arab publisher? What is the number of children's book publications per year do you expect for Arab publishing houses?**

There are many problems we face, especially the weak purchasing power due to the poor economic situation of our countries, but we are optimistic that this difficult period will end. Corona pandemic also created many problems that caused many obstacles for the Arab publisher.

As for the number of publications, there is no accurate statistic for it, but we believe that there are many new publishing houses in the Arab world issuing many new important publications.

**How do we bring back children's books issued in the past through new publications?**

There is a continuous development for publishing children's books, as publishing houses are recreating the output, printing and sometimes even the illustrations, line with the development of publishing in the world.

The important point is that the old versions really need a permanent renewal to cope with the development of the aspects of visual image and high-end printing, so the use of modern printing technologies has become an urgent necessity, in addition to the use of modern tools such as felt cloth, wood, sponge and processed silicon. Hence, all these elements contribute to the development of the publishing industry and optical vision.

**What are the most prominent projects you have now?**

Now we are heading to wider and more comprehensive areas of the book at the age of technology. The book always needs to be developed, and we have many important ideas, which will be implemented, Allah willing. This year, we tried to link the book with new technologies. For example, we linked the book to mobile

applications, where the child can read the book on paper and electronically.

All our upcoming productions in 2021, in continuation of what we started previously, will be accompanied by audio content, so we no longer have a version without sound technology, which is the basis of our work. We hope that all our upcoming publications will have the feature of the sound included in the book, noting that we did not change the price of the book when it is accompanied by the sound content and the readers like this feature.

**What ideas do you consider necessary to support the publisher and promote the level of the publishing profession?**

The most important point that we must stress is the cooperation between publishing houses and the consolidation of relations among publishers. This is beneficial for the publishing profession, and the level of the book must be raised in form and content because interest in the content of the book, its design and printing is one of the success factors of the publishing industry.

Personally, I hope to cooperate with all publishers, whether in marketing or publishing, according to my positive vision for joint publishing to improve the publishing mechanism.

**Do you consider the Arab child reluctant to read and how can we enhance his desire for reading?**

Unfortunately, the presence of the Internet and the modern technologies we use to communicate, learn and entertain greatly affected the aspects of our daily life, especially reading among children. We must all enhance the child's desire to read. Parents at home and teachers at schools can do important work through reading bedtime stories and including reading in play and school activities. We, as publishing houses, are always required to search for everything that is modern, useful and interesting for children, such as choosing attractive pictures or new topics that our children and our new generation are looking for.

But frankly, the Internet and its development did not affect the child's reading in general and we need that

the family can cooperate with the school, so that reading becomes a habit for our generations and I see that we have begun achieving this aspect and I hope we will succeed.

**What is your advice for new publishers to develop their business?**

In my opinion, we should embrace a promising category of creative writers, illustrators and professionals from the younger generation. I believe that this era represents the age of the new young people. They have an important vision in the development of all industries, especially publishing, and there is an urgent need to examine the challenges faced by publishing companies and cooperate with competent authorities to develop the work program and apply competitive practices. We must introduce a large number of new figures in the publishing industry, especially the introduction of female publishers who can present the book directed to children in a very important, sophisticated and professional way.

The use of modern technologies in the publishing and book industries should also be promoted and digital publishing has to be developed.

**You were one of the houses which saw the launch of the Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum since its early years, and you sought to achieve its goals. In addition, you had an active participation in its General Assembly. Are you satisfied with what was accomplished and what level do you wish the Forum can reach at the Arab and international levels?**

Arab Children's Book Publishers Forum contributed to the promotion of the creative production of the publishing houses and developed their work in publishing the book of the Arab Child. We hope that the Forum will not stop at a certain limit, and every year we will strive to achieve more and higher goals to serve the children's book.

However, frankly, I am not completely satisfied with the work of the Forum and I hope we can achieve better results. I wish that the Forum could reach every Arab home, as I consider it a wide gateway to the advancement

of the culture of children in the Arab world, but perhaps it could not be so because of its new members. I hope that the next board would develop a strategic plan that allows the Forum to widely reach the public.

**What are your impressions about Child's Book Award of the Forum and what do you think of the requirements of nomination for it?**

The award is good and fair and the nomination conditions are somewhat good, but I prefer, as a publisher who sees the amount of creativity and development among Arab young people, that the nomination for the award is not limited to members of the Forum only, but rather I hope that we open the door for nomination to all creative Arab young people who are waiting for many opportunities.

Do you have suggestions about the award for the coming years?

Believe me, the suggestions are great, but the circumstances resulting from this pandemic postpone many proposals. We hope that these measures will become close to publishers and readers and a strong structure will be established for them, so that the award can become international, contributing to the growth of the children's book industry in the Arab world. In addition, we wish that it could have two categories: one for old publishers and the other for young publishers.

Moreover, I would extend my deep thanks to the award and the success achieved by the General Secretariat of the Forum in the previous days, and I hope that efforts will be combined to serve their plans for development. My testimony may be biased or invalid for the Secretary General of this Forum, as he made important achievements and executed great projects and future visions, which will contribute to arranging and developing work of the Forum. I wish all the best for the next board and I hope it could achieve the aspirations of the Arab publisher, along with the wishes and vision of His Highness Sheikh Sultan Al Qasimi.

**Experience of  
the publisher,  
NASSER GROSS**

## **Arab openness to the international publishing movement - Horizon and Challenges**



**In the summer of 2005, Jim Fama, Director of the US Book Fair, called me and asked me if I agreed to be a representative of the fair in the Middle East. I replied that I would review the activities of the fair and respond to him. Then, we agreed to meet at Frankfurt Book Fair in October of the same year. Indeed, the meeting was held in Frankfurt and was also attended by the International Relations Officer at London Book Fair, Emma House, as REED Exhibitions was the organizer of both fairs. She asked me at that time to be a representative of London Book Fair as well. I was honest with them. This is because the Arab world needs to be open to the international publishing movement and international expertise as well. She added, "If co-operation will be based on this ground, I am ready for cooperation."**

The meeting was an occasion to talk about hosting the Arab world as a guest of honor at Frankfurt Fair and the benefit that would result from it, in terms of openness and professional cooperation. On this occasion, I stated: "I hope that we will go ahead together, in order to have more cooperation, benefit from your experience, pave the way for you to have access to the Arab world and serve the publishing movement in your countries. In particular, we are at the era of globalization, cooperation and openness to our different cultures. It is important that the cooperation door should be wide-open in this field."

We started collaboration on this basis. Indeed, from the beginning, I noticed great seriousness through the dialogue with Mrs. Emma House,

who had consultations with the British Council and informed them about my plans for cooperation. They agreed on the same. Accordingly, I invited Mrs. House and the official at the British Council to visit Beirut and learn about the publishing movement and prospects for cooperation with the Arab world. Then, Mrs. Susan Johnson came with Mrs. House to Beirut. Following this visit, the British Council agreed to organize a program for Arab literature for 3 years, during which Arab publishers and writers were invited to London and British writers and publishers were invited to Cairo. This program was crowned with hosting the Arab world as a guest of honor at London Book Fair in 2008. This initiative paved the way for broad cooperation between

UK and the Arab world. Its positive effects are still clear today and they are continuously increasing.

After the success of the experience between the Arab world and UK, I shifted my view to US Book Fair and Lance Versterman was its director. Thus, I contacted him to draw his attention to the necessity of caring about the Arab participation in the conference, by providing experience to Arab publishers and opening up areas of cooperation between them and American publishers. In the message I suggested hosting the Arab world as a guest of honor at US Book Fair. Actually, this issue was handled through the organization of the event in 2009. In spite of the interest of US Book Fair Management in this event to make it succeed and there was only one company that organized the two fairs, in my opinion, hosting the Arab world in New York did not lead to the desired results, either regarding the Arab presence or the development of professional relations in the field of publishing. Thus, all publishers, expert firms and experienced persons are invited to examine this experience for the purpose of review and improvement, so that benefits can be widely obtained.

## The Concerns of the Arab child

**Ms. Shahinaz Al-Aqbawi**  
Children writer and journalist  
for Al-Ahram Al-Arabi Newspaper



The concerns of the Arab child are no longer limited to their narrow circle, in terms of searching for a new game, persuading the parents to go out for a walk and having fun or even for acquiring valuable clothes, especially at the time of modern technological revolution, strong participation of children in it, the serious familiarity with the course of events and daily access to all news. Thus, we can assume that today's child has no longer limited vision, simple ambitions and hopes or is not easily persuaded.

Today's child has changed due to the many concerns that a large percentage of children in the Arab world still suffer from, especially based on the instability that some Arab countries have faced, which resulted in the dispersal of many families and the loss of many families and friends. Hence, the child in many families has become the breadwinner of the family and is responsible for supporting the family after he was the last party in the circle of responsibility, which burdened him with many problems and worries.

In spite of the crises and essential life requirements which the child encounters, he is still a child that needs pampering, attention and care. Despite he has been assigned some adult tasks due to compelling circumstances, this does not mean that he should waive his childhood dreams and hopes. In fact, bearing the responsibility will play a great role in fostering and refining the child's personality and supporting attributes that could have never appeared if he had not been subject to such tests and had not held such responsibility.

The concerns of the Arab child are not limited to sustenance of the family, as many of the scenes and media interviews conducted with children around the Arab world can simply reflect the extent of the transformation made to them, especially that their concerns have largely moved from the limited individual framework to the broad popular collective world. We see that Palestinian children talk about the homeland that has become their main concern and the children of Syria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen and Iraq are not excluded from this broader holistic vision related to searching for means of rebuilding homelands and families, wishing for stability to the home country and looking for security and safety. Even in the absence of conflicts, today's child has become a strong and effective participant in society, as he does not consider himself merely a parasite recipient who depends on others, but rather has become an actual participant, whether on the ground or even through the means of modern technology.

The child's concerns are no longer confined to the political and social events and conflicts he was forced to coexist with, as he was also chased by the epidemic and fear of infection and disease. The matter was not limited to this point, as "COVID-19" forced adults before young children to have compulsory winter sleep and summer isolation and refrain from even least means of entertainment.

Therefore, home has become his only park. Thus, it is necessary to search for entertainment, protection and education means to help children accept the idea indicating that isolation at home is only a temporary phase aimed at protection and preservation of his health. Then, we will get back to our normal life, so we have to take advantage of this phase to learn new skills through the means that each child deems appropriate for him and consistent with his tendencies, desires and social conditions.

Today's child is the man of the future, the builder of civilization and the nation, the maker of glory and the protector of the country. Indeed, it is difficult at the present time to completely eliminate all the heavy concerns that afflict many children of the Arab world, but hopefully, it is necessary to outline some of the most important and dangerous concerns and look for means, not to completely eliminate them, since in reality it is difficult to achieve this fact. Instead, we help to reduce the burdens of the child to let him breathe freely and allow him to have a normal life, even with the least available resources. This will certainly be achieved if all Arab organizations and institutions responsible for caring and protecting the child worked together and sought to help him and provide serious and influential support, in order to deliver a positive message to the child, indicating that we are aware of all the concerns of the child and we are supporting you because you represent our hidden treasure.

There is no doubt that these positive messages will have a good impact on the child, so they will sufficiently support his sense of belonging to the Arab world and reduce his fear of the future, because he will realize over time that he will not be left to bear the responsibility alone, as worries are not created for innocent children like him. Each age stage has tasks that are assigned to the relevant person in such age unknowingly. Hence, childhood tasks are sufficient for him and adults should bear some of their concerns, because the difficulties and challenges faced by the Arab world at the present time should not be addressed by the men of tomorrow, since they are like a young plant that needs care and protection to become stronger and better, so that everyone can get its benefits.