

Goodness greatness

At a time in which our region has become more recognised for its extremism than philanthropy and Arab successes have been overshadowed by failures, the newfound Takreem Awards aim to set the record straight and “make 350 million Arabs proud.” *Bespoke* finds out how.

Having set up an interview with the chairman and ceo of Olive Branch, the Takreem Arab Achievement Awards' developers, I was greeted by his enthusiastic staff, ushered into the organisation's offices and politely asked to wait a few moments. I took the opportunity to chat with the company's marketing manager, Joelle El Khoury. The young executive relished the chance to introduce Takreem, proudly recollecting what it has managed to achieve in such a short amount of time. She explained that, “Takreem was born with a commitment to recognise and award Arab leading achievers in a yearly event held at a different location across the MENA region. In the first year, the 2010 Takreem ceremony was held in Beirut [Lebanon]. On April 30th 2011 the event will take place in Doha [Qatar].”

Doha certainly seems a wise choice given its exception to the political manifestations blazing across several MENA countries, but as you would expect there were others considerations that also came into play. “Qatar has become known throughout the world for its outstanding cultural initiatives and we consider Doha to be the ideal platform to gather unseen heroes and remarkable achievers.”

At that moment, almost on cue, Ricardo Karam, the ceo and chairman, walked in. We exchanged warm smiles and firm handshakes. His introduction was of course unneeded for I knew of Karam from the many televised interviews he has conducted over the years. Something I always respected about him was that he has hosted such a wide array of personalities, whether entrepreneurs, artists, authors or politicians - the one common denominator is that they are people who have made a difference. And that's the same quality that he is now celebrating through Takreem, “Meeting global cultural and political leaders has helped shape the man I am today and this was a major influence in initiating the Takreem Arab Achievement Awards,” he explains.

When undertaking such a monumental task the success or failure will always depend on the support and financing you manage to obtain and in this Karam has been fortunate. “Takreem has been endorsed by sponsors who share the cause and believe in what we do. This year,

international companies such Total, Renault-Nissan, Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), Salam International and the Qatar Science and Technology Park have all committed to reinforce the principles of Takreem, and help us proceed with this legacy,” he reveals.

Given his years in front of the camera, it is probably not all that astonishing to discover that Karam is a charismatic man but what is unexpected is that he's startlingly sincere and humane. He speaks of the Arab crises with regretful unease adding that illiteracy is still dominant and education outdated. “The Arab regimes are very corrupted and governments are only concerned in making money but I'm hopeful that the youth are bound to make a difference.”

Nevertheless his trust in the youth of our region is not without exception as he points out, “Ask a young man who inspires him most and he will name political leaders or mediocre musicians... People must start getting acquainted with authentic self-made men to help them shape a successful future, and that is a major reason why Takreem came to life.”

There is no doubt that Takreem is a noble endeavour but to really sustain further momentum the company must consistently demonstrate objectivity, impartiality and distinction when selecting its nominees. According to Karam, the nomination process is deliberated by qualified experts who guarantee an equal opportunity for entry, with no prejudice or discrimination. This year, the distinguished selection committee includes: Her Majesty Queen Noor Al-Hussein, H.E. Dr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Dr. Mohamed El Baradei, H.E. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Carlos Ghosn and Raja Sidawi.

What can we look forward to? Well, unlike in 2010, there will be a ‘Peace Advancement Award’ in 2011. It will be granted to someone who has either contributed to spreading peace or acted as a mediator between two conflicting parties. Karam discloses that, “No one was worthy of the award in 2010 but this year the winner” has already been chosen.” We look forward to finding out more. 

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