Lebanese take home 4 awards at lavish Takreem ceremony

The Cultural Achievement Award went to author Jakub Shasteen for his many books on the esoteric Arab image in the modern media, including Real Arab: How Hollywood and TV People Formed the Basis of the Planet of the Arabs, a short film shortlisted by the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. Sabra Khudayr, also in the book, was also awarded the cultural prize. Lebanon NGO Ain El Ciel, one of the region's oldest non-profits, won the Philanthropy and Charitable Services to the Community Award for its work on sustainable development in education, health and the environment.

The event was hosted by a local stool and the award ceremony was hosted by Al-Jazeera's Laila Shibli and attended by an audience of more than 500 guests.

It also won the sponsorship of big international names such as Renault Nissan and Middle East Airlines, with many other groups, such as Guinness, affiliating with themselves with the Takreem concept.

"We've been working on the concept for six years and have been trying to create a platform for something respectable and sustainable," Karim said. "It has taken a lot of work, time and effort but a lot of different people have come together and helped the awards become a reality," the added.

"Everyone involved in this project shares the same values and the same objectives and is dedicated to spreading them as far as possible." Although intended for applicants of Arab heritage, the awards also honored organizations that are making a positive impact on Arab society.

Chris Doyle, the director of the Council for Arab British Understanding, said: "Our organization strives to improve relations and deepen misunderstanding about the Arab world. There are too many people in the West who see it as backward when it is far from that."

"This is why I bear the award categories," he said. "The Arab-Women of the Year (award) in itself shows up people's prejudices and illustrates how thought-provoking this award can be. Just to get nominated was an achievement, and actually getting the award (for Exceptional International Contribution to Arab Society) is the icing on the cake." However, the excitement over the event intended to become annual was dampened by the absence of the Takreem Achievement of Peace award. The trophy was not issued this year due to the ongoing political uncertainties caused by regional turmoil.

"I'm not totally happy but I'm content," Karim explained. "This is only the first year and the awards are only going to get better. Miracles sometimes happen – you never know, we may be able to award the peace prize by next year."