

MENA

Takreem Awards celebrate Arab excellence and honour crisis-hit Beirut

► Awards paid tribute to 11 men and women



Some of the winners at the Takreem awards. Photo: Takreem



Sunniva Rose
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The 2021 Takreem Awards, founded in 2009 to honour outstanding Arab men and women, was held on Friday in Lebanon.

The 11 winners highlighted Arab unity and focused in particular on Lebanon's unprecedented [economic crisis](#), which has plunged the country into social and political turmoil.

Winners hailed from across the region, including Lebanon, Sudan, the UAE, Iraq and Libya.

"We want to recognise the achievements of those who work in silence. We're not looking for the flashy types," [Takreem](#) founder Ricardo Karam told *The National*. "We transcend political divides."

The awards recognised their achievements in fields such as entrepreneurship, science and technology, culture, environmental sustainability, education, civic services and corporate leadership.

Organising the event, which was held in the Casino du Liban, north of Beirut, was challenging. The 2019 awards, which were supposed to take place in the Lebanese capital, were cancelled because of nationwide protests triggered by the country's financial collapse. The 2020 awards were held online following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Today, Lebanon's economic crisis shows no signs of abating, and the nation is plagued by poverty, inflation and political paralysis.

"We want to tell the world that Lebanon remains the cradle of culture," said [Mr Karam](#), a Lebanese television personality.

Mr Karam said that the idea of creating the award came to him after he was arrested as he was travelling to the US "because I had a Lebanese passport".

"I'm a world citizen. I have never had legal problems. There was no reason to arrest me. Then I understood it was just because I belong to the Arab world. I decided to work towards changing negative perceptions of Arabs."

The president and director of the Sharjah Art Foundation in the UAE, Hoor Al Qasimi, received the cultural excellence award. She said that it was a recognition of the institution's efforts to "shed light on cultural initiatives with a high impact on Arab society".

Mohammed Slim Alouini, who won the scientific and technological achievement award, said that it was "a message of thanks and appreciation to all Arab researchers and scientists who have decided to contribute to education".

Mr Alouini, a researcher in wireless communication systems, is a founding member of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia.

TAKREEM AWARDS WINNERS 2021

Corporate Leadership: Carl Bistany (Lebanon)

Cultural Excellence: Hoor Al Qasimi (UAE)

Environmental Development and Sustainability: Bkerzay (Lebanon)

Environmental Development and Sustainability: Raya Ani (Iraq)

Humanitarian and Civic Services: Women's Programs Association (Lebanon)

Humanitarian and Civic Services: Osamah Al Thini (Libya)

Excellence in Education: World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) (Qatar)

Outstanding Arab Woman: Balghis Badri (Sudan)

Scientific and Technological Achievement: Mohamed Slim Alouini (KSA)

Young Entrepreneur: Omar Itani (Lebanon)

Lifetime Achievement: Suad Al Amiry (Palestine)



Aimed at creating role models and highlighting regional success stories, the awards “celebrate Arabs”, said Raya Ani, an Iraqi architect who won the environmental development and sustainability award.

In her acceptance speech, she recounted the trauma caused by the 1991 Gulf War that pushed her to leave her country for Germany at 25 years old.

“When I saw American planes flying in the sky, when I saw my parents making efforts to make us live in security (...) I realised that we were vulnerable, that we were weak,” said Ms Ani.

“It’s been 30 years and my dream came true. I built my career and gave the opportunity to my family to live a life full of dignity. I supported the Iraqi people by participating in the Iraq pavilion at the Dubai 2021 Expo,” she said. Ms Ani currently splits her time between Dubai and New York.

The awards particularly focused on the achievements of those fighting for social justice and gender equality in politics.

Balghis Badri from Sudan, who won the outstanding Arab woman award, said in a recorded speech that she “paid tribute to Sudanese citizens fighting for their freedom, peace and stability”. Ms Badri, who was unable to travel to Lebanon for Friday’s ceremony, seemed to be referring to the current political unrest in her country.



I want to tell Beirut: you remain the most beautiful city

Suad Al Amiry, Palestinian activist, writer and architect

Lebanon’s political and economic crisis as well as tension with the Gulf caused by a recently resigned minister’s pro-Houthi comments in late October were persistent themes throughout the night.

“In the hope that Arabs return to Beirut, we’ll listen now to [orchestra conductor] Lubnan Baalbaki and the beautiful music performed by his group. If Arabs will not be united in politics, let the music be their unifying factor,” said the master of ceremony, Iraqi television anchor Laila Al

Shaikhli, as a live orchestra launched into a medley of music from across the region.

Georgina Rizk, who won the Miss Universe title in 1971, lamented the “sadness in our country and indifference of our officials who lack all sense of responsibility” before giving the lifetime achievement award to Palestinian activist, writer and architect Suad Al Amiry.

Ms Al Amiry is the founder of Riwaq, a centre for architectural conservation in Ramallah. She studied architecture at the American University of Beirut in the 1970s.

“I want to tell Beirut: you remain the most beautiful city,” she said.

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LEBANON
