



Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press's novel, Bitter Almonds, named winner in the 2017 International Book Awards

Doha, Qatar: Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press) is proud to announce that the critically-acclaimed novel, *Bitter Almonds* written by Lilas Taha, has been announced Winner in the "Fiction: Multicultural" category of the 2017 International Book Awards (IBA).

There were over 1,500 entries this year in the various categories of the award, which is in its 8th annual year. The IBA, which is sponsored by the American Book Fest, highlights a wide variety of outstanding literary fiction and non-fiction works that are the best in their categories.

"I'm honored and thankful for this prestigious award," explains author and award-winner, Lilas Taha. "The trials of the Palestinian diaspora provided motivation for my story, *Bitter Almonds*. I wrote the novel hoping to touch readers' hearts and convey a message of respect. With this international recognition, it gives me great pleasure to learn that I helped shine a needed light on the struggles of innocent refugees, and bring a measure of attention to the plight of Palestinians."

"Lilas Taha is an extremely talented author, whose work we are proud to publish at HBKU Press," explains Rodolphe A Boughaba, Acting Executive Director of Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press. "This book has successfully brought a contemporary crisis to the forefront of the literary world, in a way that humanizes the refugee crisis and makes it tangible to anyone around the world. Taha's gift in developing characters with compassion and very real emotions appeals to both young and adult readers."

Set in Damascus, Syria, in the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s, *Bitter Almonds* follows the coming-of-age of two young refugees as they encounter political turmoil and personal sacrifice.

Omar is an orphaned Palestinian born into chaos and displaced by violence, whose life has been shaped by forces beyond his control. As he tries to find his place in the world, his future becomes even more complicated when he falls for Nadia, the daughter of the refugee family who raised him. Amid the confusion and instability of a modernizing world, Omar has only one thing to hold on to: a love that gives him hope and propels him forward.



While Omar searches for the right path, Nadia is maturing into womanhood, forced to shed her youthful idealism and learn to cope with the tough realities of her world. But a cruel load thrust upon her by her selfish brother threatens her chances of breaking out of her traditional social mould to create her own destiny.

A love story rooted in history and Palestinian culture, *BITTER ALMONDS* is inspired by tremulous events in the Middle East and author Lilas Taha's family history. Born in Kuwait to Syrian and Palestinian parents, Taha had to leave the country when it was invaded by Iraq in 1990. Given the current Syrian refugee crisis, Omar and Nadia's stories are extremely pertinent, as they encapsulate common struggles of refugees and humanize these victims of political turmoil and violence for readers from all backgrounds. At the core of this novel is the dauntless human spirit and the complex struggles of ordinary people trying to overcome extraordinary circumstances.

Moving and compelling, *Bitter Almonds* explores displacement and exile, family duty and honour, and the universal feelings of love and loss.

Naomi Shihab Nye, four-time Pushcart Prize winner and celebrated Palestinian poet and author, explains, "Lilas Taha's great gift in *Bitter Almonds* is to create characters and scenes so richly resonant with life and vitality, that the complicated, lush world of the Middle East feels as tangible and close as any world you are living in."

The Lady magazine (UK) casts the book as, "...an enthralling mix of history and Palestinian culture...Riveting."

Jeffrey Keen, President and CEO of the American Book Fest says of the awards, "The 2017 results represent a phenomenal mix of books from a wide array of publishers throughout the world. With a full publicity and marketing campaign promoting the results of IBA, this year's winners and finalists will gain additional media coverage for the summer season."

Bitter Almonds is currently being translated into Arabic by HBKU Press.

—ENDS—

For further information and press inquiries, please contact Rima Ismail of HBKU Press at +974 55564198 or by email at rismail@hbku.edu.qa.



ABOUT HBKU PRESS

Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press), formerly known as Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing (BQFP), launched its program in 2010 as a world-class publishing house founded on international best practices, excellence and innovation. HBKU Press strives to be a cornerstone of Qatar's knowledge-based economy by providing a unique local and international platform for literature, literacy, scholarship, discovery and learning. Headquartered in Doha, Qatar, HBKU Press publishes peer reviewed journals, monographs, reference books, fiction and non-fiction titles for adults and for children. Aiming to promote the love of reading and writing, HBKU Press is helping to establish a vibrant scholarly and literary culture in Qatar and the Middle East.