

HBKU Press's new children's title highlights the plight of refugee children

Doha, Qatar: When most of us think back to our childhood, we are lucky enough to recall fond memories of a simple, happy time where the only causes of stress were studying for tests or dealing with an obnoxious sibling. The word *childhood* itself invokes thoughts of laughter, playing outside on bright summer days, and feeling safe, secure and happy.

But the reality of childhood for child laborers around the world today cannot be farther from this idealistic walk down memory lane. They face hardships and causes of stress that take over their daily lives and rob them of the freedom of childhood that they rightly deserve.

According to the United Nations(UN), it is estimated that around 215 million children work full-time, of which, some 168 million children are trapped in child labor. They do not go to school and have little or no time to play, nor do they receive proper nutrition or care. They are denied the chance to be children.

The UN categorizes child labor into three categories: slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labor or recruitment of children for use in a variety of illicit activities; labor performed by a child who is under the minimum age specified for that kind of work (as defined by national legislation, in accordance with accepted international standards), and that is thus likely to impede the child's education and full development; and labor that jeopardizes the physical, mental or moral well-being of a child, either because of its nature or because of the conditions in which it is carried out, known as "hazardous work".

Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press's (HBKU Press) latest title, *Missing Colours*, written and illustrated by Gulnar Hajo, imaginatively and symbolically explores the hardships faced by child laborers in cities around the world.

In *Missing Colours*, the powerful and evocative narrative takes the reader on journey to reveal the truth of how child laborers survive in cities far away from home. Despite their adversity, which is represented by their bleak and colourless surroundings, these children



are optimistic about their future, and see the few glimpses of colour around them as representative of a better life where they experience all that childhood has to offer. Their dreams are simple, and their happiness lies in a blue sky and a sweet breeze.

“As a publisher, having a diverse range of books for our audience to choose from is important,” explains Arabic Editor at HBKU Press, Jameela Sultan Almass Aljasseem. “The subject of child laborers is difficult to discuss with children, however, the author approaches the topic in a way which is intriguing and thought-provoking. It really makes a child think and opens the doors to discussion, which is the sign of any good book.”

The author/illustrator, Gulnar Hajo, was born in Damascus, Syria, where she graduated from the College of Fine Arts, University of Damascus. She has a passion for writing and illustrating for children, and has done that since 2005, with 20 titles to date, including illustrating the 2016 World Book Day book, *Manal's World*, by Qatari author Muneera Saad Al-Rumaihi.

“I think a lot about these children that the major population has seemingly forgotten,” explains Hajo. “The idea came to my mind to highlight the plight of child laborers and show other children that they are just like them, and therefore deserve to play, to live, and to learn, just like them. I hope that with this book, these forgotten voices will have a chance to be heard.”

By publishing a variety of titles aimed at different audiences, HBKU Press aims to promote the love of reading and writing and hopes to help in establishing a vibrant scholarly and literary culture in Qatar and the Middle East. Since 2010, HBKU Press has been dedicated to publishing a variety of peer reviewed journals, monographs, reference books, fiction and non-fiction titles for adults and for children.

Ask for copies of *Missing Colours* at your local bookstore today.

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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.