



Award-winning HBKU Press author, Lilas Taha, visits students at Qatar Academy Doha

Doha, Qatar: Lilas Taha, the Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press) author of the award-winning book *Bitter Almonds*, visited Qatar Academy – Doha (QA) campus yesterday to speak to Year 9 and Year 12 students about her inspirations and the overall importance of literacy.

The event was organized by HBKU Press. In addition to their work as world-class publishers, HBKU Press is committed to serving the greater community in which it resides through various outreach programs. HBKU Press proudly hosts information sessions, academic, literary and artistic workshops, and training and development courses that help aspiring authors in any field break into the publishing world and establish a love of reading and writing in the community at a young age.

“HBKU Press authors share our commitment to giving back to our collective communities,” explains Executive Director of HBKU Press, Bachar Chebaro.

“Outreach opportunities, such as this one, are important for our youth as it allows them to develop a personal connection with books and reading and it opens doors to a world of possibilities for them. Meeting an author and hearing about what inspires them allows younger generations to dream and pursue their own literary passions.”

Taha’s discussion with the students focused on her inspiration for writing. The engineer-turned-writer was born in Kuwait to a Syrian mother and a Palestinian father, and immigrated to the U.S. following the Gulf War. Pursuing her true passion for creative writing, Taha brings her professional interests and social background together in her novels.

“Talking about my book is always a pleasure, but discussing the writing process with a group of multicultural youths adds another level of enjoyment,” explains Taha regarding her visit with QA students. “I have a chance to touch their minds at a critical age, hoping to inspire, encourage, and show that one can overcome possible barriers to literary expression.”

Bitter Almonds was the winner in the “Fiction: Multicultural” category of the 2017 International Book Awards (IBA). 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.

Moving and compelling, *Bitter Almonds* explores displacement and exile, family duty and honour, and the universal feelings of love and loss. At the core of this novel is the dauntless human spirit and the complex struggles of ordinary people trying to overcome extraordinary circumstances.

"The visit of the author Lilas Taha to Qatar Academy - Doha reinforces the concept of "creativity" which is one of four concepts underlying the language and literature program," explains Mahmoud Amer, the Arabic team leader at Qatar Academy Doha. "The creative method of Lilas Taha is a global and unique model, and this is what we are encouraging our students to use as this will help them to pass on our heritage to the whole world."

Bitter Almonds will be released in Arabic by HBKU Press during Taha's visit to Doha. Taha is also working on her second novel with HBKU Press which will be released in the near future.

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ABOUT HBKU PRESS

Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press) 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 Fiction and Non-Fiction titles for adults and for children, and academic and reference materials. HBKU Press aims to promote the love of reading and writing by helping to establish a vibrant scholarly and literary culture in Qatar and the Middle East.



ABOUT QATAR ACADEMY - DOHA (QAD)

QAD is a centre of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. It is a private, chartered, non-profit organization founded on 1996 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the father Emir.

QAD empowers students to achieve academic excellence and be responsible citizens by offering a rigorous program encompassing an international English-medium education, and strong Arabic and Islamic Studies. The QAD community supports and challenges students to be critical thinkers, and active and contributing members of society, through learning experiences that serve the needs, interests and learning styles of each student.