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Eight winners of the Zayed Book Award from last week share Dh7 million in prize money. One of the awardees, Kalimat, publishes books out of Sharjah – only in Arabic and only for children

**Jasmine Al Kutab**

It's a figure sure to excite any parent. Eight winners of the prestigious Zayed Book Award, which took place last week in Abu Dhabi, received prize money of Dh7,000,000 each, including a whopping Dh7 million.

Among the honorees is publishing house Kalimat that publishes only children's books in Arabic. They stepped up to publish and distribute the award-winning books. It's the general manager of Kalimat Group, Said, who served as UAE Emiri's spokesman, said, "We started 10 years ago. When the company began, we had one aim – providing the Arabic book reader with the best and most nurturing children's books."

Founded by Ibrahim Ismail Al-Qasbi in 2007, Kalimat is the first publishing house in UAE for publishing kids' books. It has a total of 100 titles, well-timed, in 2016, at the London Book Fair. Kalimat was then Publisher of Arab and Transnational Excellence Award. The group has produced over 11 books in three years, covering various books for multiple age groups with particular attention to topics that include tales from UAE's unique culture and heritage.

Kalimat says the aim is to protect the Arabic language, which is disappearing among children in the Arab world. The reason, predictably enough, are social media and technology. "There is enough Arabic, English material for them, but not in the Arabic language, it is slowly fading away. This is exactly the reason why we entered the market to grow the number of Arabic books for youth."

Soon after the success across the UAE, Kalimat opened a second company 'Haram', which means haram. The educational content, and stories, intended to be taught in the schools, so we look at it as a challenge and created books for classrooms," offers Said, who

says his books aren't pedantic – no preachy tones and no-did, or 'learn-to-read'.

The themes include moral aspects of life, family, friendship, traditions of the UAE, as well as the country's rich heritage and art, but certainly not the least, stories that tell about the father of the nation, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. "Zayed Award is one of our most popular books for children," all of which played an immense part in the publication's success.

The publishing house developed a third entity, 'Haram', which deals in fiction books for young adults, as well as in Arabic – the bookshop prior to partnering with international publishers from the UK and France – all to help enhance the Arabic language among UAE's children.

The majority of writers are from the Arab world, and around 90 per cent of the books are in Arabic in the original. Five per cent are translated from English.

So what are the plans after winning Dh7,000,000? For one, it will help the team develop even better books that educate children. Said says, "We are already in talks for expanding and finding more partnerships and publishing more books. We have more than 100 titles in the pipeline, and we're beyond happy when we received the award, it's a great recognition and we feel it's the result of hard work."

While the publishing scene like through in the UAE is growing and it's continuing to grow, "In the last five years, the UAE has become a hub for publishing business". He says, although everything here is promising and needs to be encouraged, but the industry is facing many challenges. "That is why each of us would encourage us to keep going – we must keep the Arabic language alive."

That is of utmost importance.

[harambooks.com](http://harambooks.com)

Jasmine Al Kutab writes and reports on all things Abu Dhabi

- WINNERS**
- First:** The Literature Award  
Awarded at Sharjah (The Autumn of Innocence) by Lebanese author Abbas Bayoum, published by Dar Al Saqi (2016)
- Second:** The Contribution to the Development of Arabic Award  
Al Isam wal Insaar (Islam and the Human Being) by Mohammed Chahrouh from Syria, published by Dar Al Saqi (2016)
- Third:** The Children's Literature Award  
This award is designed to promote Arab children's literature published by Saeed Media - Kuwait (2016)
- Fourth:** The Translation Award  
International Philosophy (El-Laila wal-Ruh) translated from Arabic to French by Lebanese/French poet Basim Al-Hadi, published by Dr. Graydon, Berlin (2016)
- Fifth:** The Literary and Art Criticism Award  
Fikr wal-Fikr by the Iraqi poet/translator Saad Al-Dabbas, published by Al-Kalimat Group (2016)
- Sixth:** The Arabic Culture in Other Languages Award  
Salam Culture (Salam, Our Nature) by David Winters, Denmark by David Winters
- Seventh:** The Publishing and Technology Award  
Kalimat Group, Sharjah, UAE



**ROOTING FOR ARABIC**  
Said, general manager Kalimat Group