

UNHCR awards Somali refugees who won regional art competition

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 24 (UNHCR)-At a brief ceremony held here earlier this week, the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia, Mrs. Clementine Nkweta-Salami, awarded prizes to three talented Somali refugees who won a regional art competition under the theme 'Home', reflecting on 'Durable Solutions to End the Displacement of the People of Somalia'.



The UNHCR Representative poses for photo with Abdirahim(far left), Halima (L) & Abdulahi. Photo-UNHCR/K.G.Egziabher

Siblings Abdulahi Abdulkadir Osman, 18, Halima Abdulkadir Osman, 13 and Abdirahim Abdulkadir Osman, 17, swept all the prizes in that order and each received a brand new laptop and a certificate of recognition from the Representative.

The competition was organized by the UNHCR Office covering Somalia with the aim to promote peace and stability in the war-ravaged Horn of African nation so that all displaced Somalis can return home. It was also meant to recognize the resilience of the forcibly displaced despite their plight.

“It is not easy to confront the challenge of being a refugee and excelling in art,” said Mrs. Nkweta-Salami, adding, “in spite of the challenges, you have excelled and won all the prizes and I would like to congratulate you all on your courage and success.”

Expressing her belief that the laptops would broaden their horizons, the Representative encouraged the artists to continue to paint. “I can see in front of me a very talented family and I look forward to seeing more of these in the future,” she said, staring at the family of seven, including the parents, who are all painters.

The evidently tough competition, pitting gifted Somali refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya and displaced people inside Somalia against each other, was reviewed by a high-level panel, including a Somali Minister, a former Somali Ambassador, senior media personalities from Somalia and Kenya as well as the Acting Representative of UNHCR’s office in Somalia. The

panel selected Abdulahi's painting, entitled '**Open the Home of Peace**' as the winning piece. Halima's '**The Sad Memory of the Explosion of my Home**' and Abdirahim's '**Protecting the Peace is Saving the Home**' were ranked second and third.



The evidently elated father shows a V sign as he poses for photo with the UNHCR Representative and his talented step-children and wife. Photo: UNHCR/K.G.Egziabher

The same office organized a similar competition in 2014 and Abdirahim Abdulkadir Osman, who is now in third place, was the winner. "This is our second victory in this regional competition and we are very happy for that," said Abdirahim, who, in 2014, pocketed \$300 as a prize and sold \$1,000 worth of paintings.

The young artists expressed their joy on winning the regional competition and thanked UNHCR for the laptops,

which, they said, will help them promote their work. They appealed to the Representative to help facilitate similar opportunities in the future so they can promote their skills and make money to supplement their monthly living allowances.

Abdulahi, Halima and Abdirahim learnt the art of painting from their uncle Mohammed Ousman, who studied art in Russia together with his twin brother Abdulkadir, who is the father of the three winning artists and two other boys- also painters.

As conflict raged in Somalia, the two opened "**Picasso Art School**" in Mogadishu and started teaching art to talented Somali youth. This put them in collision course with the Al Shabaab militants and eventually cost Abdulkadir his life. According to Mohammed, the militants considered the teaching of art as 'haram' or against the teachings of Islam, and gunned down Abdulkadir along with his four children for promoting art.

Undeterred by the brutal murder of his brother, Muhamed remained in Mogadishu and continued to run the school when thousands were living the capital in 2009. "He decided to stay in Mogadishu because he wanted to help talented Somalis unleash their potentials," says Abdirahim of his uncle, who, is now his step-father as is customary in the Somali culture. The 59-year-old was eventually forced to leave Mogadishu, flying to Berbera in Somaliland in late 2011 and then crossing to Aw-Barre refugee camp in Ethiopia, where he joined his brother's widow, who has now become his wife, and her five children.

UNHCR transferred Mohammed and his family to Addis Ababa on protection grounds, and in the belief that they could make a living there from their art while also supported under UNHCR's 'urban refugee' program. They eke out additional income by selling pencil portrait sketches and paintings around Addis Ababa but they say selling paintings and drawings can be tough.