



ANNUAL REPORT



2020

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REFLECTING ON 2020

To say that 2020 was a difficult year would be an understatement of incredible proportions. So many lives have been taken away too soon, so many weaknesses within an unequal system have been violently exposed, and the state of democracy in the U.S and around the world has reached a level of fragility we never thought possible in our lifetime. **For AMEL, however, 2020 was our most successful year yet.** The global switch to online workspaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic came at a time when AMEL was already 3 years ahead of the game. That advantage paid off in our bids for grants from major institutions, such as the Aspen Institute's Stevens Initiative, which is funded by the State Department. Thanks to that grant, we were able to bring together 140 civic leaders from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria and the United States for a unique exchange program titled - appropriately - Global Allyship. This is just one example of AMEL's leaps forward in 2020, among many others.

Throughout the year, AMEL continued to be a strong voice for human rights in the halls of power - from the United States, to Sudan, and beyond. Through meetings with key leaders, campaigns, and more, we continued advocating for those whose rights have been trampled upon and for new approaches that will empower activists and young leaders in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) who are mobilizing for freedom, rights and inclusion for all. Media platforms such as BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera, and Democracy Digest, among others, further amplified these efforts and assisted AMEL with impacting the international discourse.

2020 also marked a milestone in terms of partnerships. AMEL joined forces with esteemed partners such as the National Endowment for Democracy, DefendDefenders, Young Professionals in Foreign Policy, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL), among many others. AMEL was also able to mobilize its global network of activists and allies to create and support critical COVID-19 awareness campaigns targeting the Middle East and Africa. More than 13 million people were reached with key messages in local languages about the virus and stopping its spread by leveraging social media and partnerships, including with the United Nations COVID-19 Communications Response Initiative.

As we kick off 2021, we carry with us both the bitterness of loss and the sweetness of AMEL's triumph. Together, we will continue to push ahead, holding on to the hope for the better world that AMEL promises to build.

Mohamed Abubakr

President



Megan Hallahan

Executive Director



2020 MILESTONES

Below are some highlights of the milestones reached in 2020 - read the full report for details!

TRAINED

330+

ACTIVISTS

FROM

35

COUNTRIES

ON

28

TOPICS

EMPOWERED

100

ALUMNI

ENGAGED IN

350

ADVOCACY
ACTIONS

TARGETED

20

COUNTRIES ON
GENDER EQUALITY

COALITION OF

35

TOP JEWISH &
MUSLIM LEADERS

MORE THAN

28K

IN OUR ONLINE
COMMUNITY

REACHED OVER

13M

WITH COVID
AWARENESS

THE AMEL INSTITUTE (AMELI)

The AMEL Institute is a fully online training academy that innovates upon decades of experience in youth empowerment and virtual training projects by AMEL's leadership. The Institute focuses on empowering the young generation of civil society activists with practical knowledge and skills so that they can engage in activism more safely and effectively. Through a variety of programs, the Institute equips young leaders in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) with the necessary skills and experience to lead the way to a better future for all by empowering and connecting them with one another and with peers, experts, and policymakers in the Global North.

While 2020 was a difficult year for many, it served as an incredibly impactful and fruitful experience for **over 330 young people from the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the United States**. Three new online programs - Global Allyship, Communication & Leadership (CommLeaders), and 100 Citizens - were created in order to build understanding, increase activism efficacy, and provide young civil society activists and human rights defenders with the tools to communicate their causes, step up their leadership, and build ties and cooperation with the wider activist community.

The AMEL Institute programs in 2020 were highly successful, garnering strong scores and feedback from program participants. To highlight just a few examples:

GLOBAL ALLYSHIP

198

is the number of times students mentioned the words "amazing", "great", and "love" in the AMEL survey

92%

would recommend Global Allyship to future students

COMM LEADERS

100% stated that they felt more confident as a leader

"I would like to thank you for this program, because in this long journey of self-knowledge with your program I have taken 'the plane' and saved a lot of time! I have restructured my personal story and I am even more motivated to share it in order to empower the youth."

--C., a trainee in the 100 Citizens program

100 CITIZENS

AMELI: GLOBAL ALLYSHIP

In the wake of unprecedented mass mobilizations across the US and worldwide, and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, AMEL created a special Summer 2020 virtual exchange program: the Global Allyship Program. The Program brought together young professionals in the US and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) to help build understanding and allyship across borders while building their capacities to be better leaders in times of crisis. The Program was supported by the Stevens Initiative, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, with funding provided by the U.S. Government, and is administered by the Aspen Institute. Originally slated to train 80 participants, the Program significantly exceeded its goals and reached 140 young leaders from the United States and the MENA region. Half of the 140 young leaders selected for the program were from the US and half were from MENA, including 11 from Algeria, 19 from Morocco, 16 from Tunisia, and 19 from Syria (including 11 refugees).

The intensive 1-month online course included video lectures, live Q&A sessions with lecturers, small-group teamwork and discussions, and optional medium-sized group interactive sessions. The program was anchored around weekly live sessions administered via Zoom with leading practitioners and world-renowned professors from Harvard, Stanford, and Brown universities. Each of the 4 sessions focused on a different topic: **Allyship during Crisis** (led by Mohamed Abubakr and the AMEL Team), **Democracy & Human Rights in Times of Crisis** (led by Larry Diamond of Stanford and Ugandan human rights advocate Nicholas Opiyo), **Entrepreneurship** (led by Danny Warshay of Brown University), and **Nonviolent Methods for Social Change** (led by Erica Chenoweth of Harvard and practitioners Vanessa Wruble and Azaz Elshami). Between weekly sessions, small groups and pairs held meetings to get to know each other, with each meeting earning them points as part of a gamified challenge that galvanized participation and intercultural understanding.



AMELI: GLOBAL ALLYSHIP

The Global Allyship Program was highly interactive and impactful, garnering strong evaluation results, among which:

92%

Would Recommend
Global Allyship to
Future Students

91%

Completed All
Requirements to
Graduate

90%

"Learned Something
New About People
Different From Me"

87%

"Felt Part of a Diverse
and Inclusive Group"

280

One-on-One &
Small-Group
Meetings Outside of
Regular Class Hours

198

Number of times
students mentioned
the words "Amazing,"
"Great," and "Love" in
the AMEL Survey

175%

Admission: AMEL
admitted 140
students, when we'd
planned for 80

140%

Students on average
participated more
hours than required

"The Global Allyship program provided me with tools and strategies to become a better ally and work for democratic values here in the United States. I got to meet like-minded people from not only in my own country, but from Middle Eastern and North African countries. The best part of the Global Allyship program was the lifelong relationships I built."

--T. trainee from the USA

The Global Allyship program clearly struck a chord with young activists from both the US and the MENA region and injected much-needed energy, hope and understanding among the next generation of leaders from these crucial areas. With Allyship being a key AMEL theme, and the building of bridges between the Middle East and the Global North a top priority at AMEL, the Global Allyship Program will certainly be a central program at AMEL for years to come.

AMELI: COMMLEADERS

The Communication & Leadership Program (CommLeaders) was created in order to provide young Middle Eastern and African (MEA) human rights and civil society activists with the tools to effectively express themselves and their causes in today's modern online environment, which was a critical gap identified by participants of the 2019 AMELI pilot program. The CommLeaders interactive online training program focused on helping 100 activists from across the MEA region become better leaders by becoming better communicators. To provide participants with a useful and impactful activism toolbox, the program covered a broad range of salient topics, including:

- Leadership and public narratives
- Stories for media and advocacy
- Social media platforms, strategies and campaigns
- Graphic- and video-making for new media
- Filming for activism
- Public speaking

Throughout the six-week course, video lessons were posted on the AMEL Institute website for the participants to watch in preparation for online discussions and assignments. Each assignment was reviewed by Mentors from the MENA region who provided feedback on the strengths of the piece and on possibilities for improvement. CommLeaders lecturers featured a diverse range of communication experts, practitioners, influencers, and journalists who provided real-world experience and guidance to the program's 100 participants. The program was conducted in English with some translation available in French and Arabic. The training program was highly impactful and participants expressed higher levels of self-confidence and an increase in communication skills thanks to the program. The following graphic demonstrates some of the positive impacts that the program had on participants' activism, and a full impact report is available upon request.

**"I am more effective
as a leader"**

97.1%
agreed

**"I am more effective
as a communicator"**

100%
agreed

**"I have already used what
I learned in my activism or life"**

85.3%
agreed

AMELI: 100 CITIZENS

Building upon the years of experience of its leaders in creating online citizen journalism and peacebuilding training programs, AMEL launched a new project in early 2020. The project's aim was to enhance the capacities of young European Muslims so that they could express themselves, communicate as leaders, and promote social cohesion. As part of a larger effort by a coalition of French and Tunisian organizations supported by the European Union, the "100 Citizens" Project entailed the creation of an original training curriculum and the management of a 2-month online course for 100 young Muslims in Europe, most of whom were from Middle Eastern or African backgrounds.

The first phase of the project focused on the development of an original curriculum on communication topics. Practitioners from similar backgrounds and experiences as the participants were identified and mobilized to provide video lectures for the program. Each video was subtitled in French, German, and Arabic, and the final curriculum included 14 lectures organized into seven modules covering:

- **Narratives, identity and leadership**
- **Storytelling**
- **Communicating for Advocacy**
- **Finding and telling media stories**
- **Developing communication campaigns for new media**
- **Videomaking, graphics and visuals for new media**
- **Communicating universal human values for social cohesion**



The second phase of the project entailed delivering this online training to build the leadership and communication skills of the program's participants, who faced degrees of uncertainty about their place within their own identity groups and within society at large. Following recruitment and selection processes led by coalition partners, 100 participants from France, Austria, Belgium, and Germany were chosen to take part in the training. The interactive training program took place through a private Facebook group where new lectures and assignments were posted each week and where participants engaged with one another, peer mentors, the lecturers, and the AMEL team. The training lasted for a period of eight weeks during July and August 2020.

Following the online training, coalition partners in France, including the ALMA Association and Connecting Actions, are continuing to work with the young leaders by organizing workshops and activities to further empower them so that they may serve as catalysts for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe and beyond.

AMELI: SUDAN

In 2020, AMEL teamed up with the National Endowment for Democracy to begin a project that would jumpstart the civic capacity-building capabilities of the young generations of Sudan who have only ever experienced dictatorship. The Sudan Democracy Action Project entails the creation and implementation of an original curriculum on subjects critical to democratic development and transition.



The curriculum includes lectures by Sudanese experts and practitioners on topics including: Human Rights, Democratic Development, Understanding Power, Rule of Law, Ending Culture of Impunity, Conflict Transformation, Women, Peace & Security, Advocacy and Strategic Messaging. Interactive assignments and discussions will further reinforce the concepts covered in the video lectures and help build a community among diverse young leaders from all over Sudan.

The online training program will be piloted in early 2021 for **5,000 young people** with the goal of refining the model so that it can be made accessible to millions more across the country. This initiative is a first step towards empowering the young generations of Sudan to be leaders and custodians of the country's democratic transition and consolidation.

AMELI: ALUMNI

Throughout 2020, AMEL engaged its **community of 100 Alumni** from more than 32 countries across Africa and the Middle East. Activities included webinars, networking, and campaigns such as the COVID-19 awareness campaign (see next page). Webinars included a training session with disinformation journalist Shayan Sardarizadeh from BBC Monitoring/BBC World Service. During the 1-hour session, Alumni learned about the difference between misinformation and disinformation, good digital habits, safely consuming and spreading information online, reducing the flow and impact of mis/disinformation, and the trends, impacts, and lessons learned from mis/disinformation during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The expertise of the Alumni themselves was also leveraged and highlighted. For example, at AMEL's public webinar on the impact of COVID-19 on Africa, we engaged as a featured speaker alumnus Sabere Traore from Burkina Faso. Sabere is a medical doctor, public health professional, and Fulbright scholar at Emory University in Atlanta, where he is also working together with the Centers for Disease Control. Among other Alumni engagement activities were webinars and networking sessions with Young Professionals in Foreign Policy, as well as ongoing discussions and activities on the AMEL Alumni online forum. With the number of Alumni growing to more than 300 by the end of 2020, engagement activities will be a top priority for AMEL for years to come.

AMEL ADVOCACY

AMEL Advocacy initiatives focus on promoting **human rights values** and advancing policies and signals that can best advance these values in the Middle East and Africa (MEA). In 2020, AMEL Advocacy focused on elevating the voices of MEA activists working for human rights and democracy, especially in key countries at the intersection of youth-led generational change and geopolitical strategic interests. In particular, AMEL engaged throughout the year to:

- Raise human rights concerns and priorities in meetings with various Sudanese officials during AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr's first visit to the country since the fall of the Al-Bashir dictatorship;
- Provide issue education in US halls of power about Sudan and its democratic transition that is underway following the youth-led movement that toppled the dictatorship in 2019;
- Serve a leading role in an international coalition briefing policymakers in the US and Europe about crackdowns on human rights defenders and civil society activists in Uganda during the run-up to the presidential election in January 2021;
- Provide insights and networks of local activists and experts for American diplomats, policymakers, and staffs seeking to understand situations unfolding throughout the MEA region;
- Elevate the voices of young activists in #DefendDemocracy, an international campaign to raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding democracy in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Launch and incubate Advocates for Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA-AGE), an activist-led initiative to raise awareness about gender issues in the MENA region, encourage women and girls to elevate their voices, engage more boys and men worldwide in supporting the issue, and advance gender parity locally and regionally.



AMEL ALLYSHIP

AMEL's efforts to **build bridges between diverse communities** included continuing to serve in an incubator role for the Inter Jewish Muslim Alliance (IJMA), a coalition of activists and representatives from major American Jewish and Muslim organizations who work together on common values and shared interests. Throughout 2020, bimonthly discussions were held and actions taken based on "ijma", the Arabic word for consensus. Among other actions, the coalition worked together on the development and planning of a webinar series to educate each community about the other, which will take place throughout 2021.



In March 2020, as **COVID-19** was spreading rapidly around the world, AMEL began mobilizing its ecosystem of civil society activists and respected young leaders across Africa and the Middle East to disseminate vetted information in local languages. Collaborating with partners such as the UN on its COVID-19 Communications Response Initiative, AMEL leveraged the power of social media to reach over 13 million people with critical information on the virus and how to prevent its spread. AMEL also led webinars related to COVID-19 for various networks, such as AMEL Alumni, Young Professionals in Foreign Policy, and others, as discussed on page 10.



AMEL SUPPORTERS & PARTNERS

Thank You AMEL Supporters, Partners and Friends, including:

- Covington & Burling
- Grossman Young & Hammond
- National Endowment for Democracy
- Stevens Initiative
- Aspen Institute
- Agir Localement Militer Activement Association (ALMA)
- The Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund
- The Russell Berrie Foundation
- The Silicon Valley Community Foundation
- The Goodman Family Supporting Foundation of the Jewish Community Foundation of the East Bay
- Rugged Elegance Foundation
- Schwab Charitable
- Harvard University
- Network for Good
- AmazonSmile
- Facebook
- Benevity
- Advocacy Assembly
- American Democracy Month Council
- Chapter Four Uganda
- Connecting Actions
- DefendDefenders
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
- Muslim-Jewish Conference
- New Story Leadership
- ROOTS Africa
- Stanford University
- Together We Remember
- UN COVID-19 Communications Response Initiative
- Young Professionals in Foreign Policy

And thousands of generous individuals and activists all over the globe!

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Nicholas Opiyo - Human Rights Lawyer and Founder of Chapter Four Uganda

Steven Feldstein - Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary at the US State Department

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

In 2021, AMEL will expand its impact by:

- Training **5000** young Sudanese leaders in democratic development so that they can be even more effective leaders of the historic transition that is underway.
- Expanding the AMEL Institute curriculum to include original lectures on Holocaust Education, Genocide Prevention and more.
- Training more than **250** young human rights and civil society activists from across Africa and the Middle East in the aforementioned topics as well as human rights, activism safety, conflict transformation, and leveraging new media.
- Bringing together young leaders from the Middle East and the US for shared learning and exchange journeys through the Global Allyship program.
- Continuing to help build up the MENA Advocates for Gender Equality initiative and the Inter Jewish Muslim Alliance.
- Spearheading more than **500** advocacy actions in support of human rights values and the activists that are fighting for them across Africa & the Middle East.
- And much more!

Thank you to all the partners and supporters who have made our work possible so far and who will help us achieve a greater impact in 2021!

