



Annual Report 2018



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Message from the President

Dear friends,

In designing our programs, I have one goal in mind: to provide the support that I wished I had had as a young activist in Sudan. Two years into launching AMEL, I'm proud to say my younger self would be pleased with what AMEL is providing activists from the Middle East and Africa (MEA). Growing up, those who dared speak out in support of human rights, women's rights or LGBTQ rights were forcefully silenced. At AMEL, we are providing a voice to the voiceless.



The young activists we work with make me confident that Africa and the Middle East's best days are still to come. This belief is not sheer optimism, but rather an informed and evidence-based projection. MEA millennials are highly educated, infinitely creative and, most importantly, self-motivated. As I write these words, young people in Sudan are continuing over 4 months of peaceful protests against the genocidal regime. Despite facing live-fire, beatings, and torture in Sudanese prisons, these activists have stayed true to their teachings and remained non-violent. I have had a hand in training young Sudanese activists for the past decade. Watching this generation protest for their rights, while simultaneously wearing their values on their sleeves and not being provoked into violence, shows me that a better future for Sudan is more than just possible - it is inevitable. This is proof that the non-violent lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. can be passed from generation to generation. AMEL plans to be the lead organization passing these values and teachings to young activists across the region. I sleep better knowing that the future of Sudan is in good hands, and our aim at AMEL is to ensure that the future of the entire MEA region is in the hands of well-trained activists committed to human rights and pluralism.

Our goals remain ambitious. We plan to train a generation of leaders who can change their societies from within, supporting the human rights values we hold dear. There are thousands of young people ready to take on the responsibility of creating this change, but they can't do it alone. They need our help, and we need yours. Nothing we do is possible without the support and dedication of the many people who make up the AMEL staff, directors, advisors, volunteers, partners, and contributors. It is a family of activists and leaders that continually grows and we are beyond grateful to each and every one of you.

Thank you for your continued support,

Mohamed Abubakr

Elevating Voices from Diverse Young Leaders: the AMEL Speakers Bureau



2018 got off to an exciting start with the launch of the AMEL Speakers Bureau's online training program for young leaders. Five bridge-builders who reside in the U.S. but who are originally from the Middle East and Africa took part in one-on-one public speaking and speech-crafting training with Lior Shoham, a renowned trainer and coach whose clients span 20 countries and include Google, Gett, Barclays, Citibank, Techstars, TAU Ventures, the Schusterman Foundation, and more.

During the course of the three-month online training, the speakers developed their stories and were mentored by AMEL staff, board, and volunteers. Armed with drafts of their stories, the Speakers came together in New York in early March for an intensive workshop in storytelling and public speaking mechanics led by Eduardo Placer, a top speaking coach, social entrepreneur, and motivational speaker. By the end of the three-day workshop, the Speakers gave TED-style talks at a showcase at the headquarters of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and they brought the house down!

My Voice, Our Future Campaign



MEET THE CHANGEMAKERS
OF TOMORROW.
THEIR VOICES MUST BE
HEARD TODAY.



With speaker training complete, the AMEL Speakers Bureau turned to the development of the first campaign of the Bureau: *My Voice, Our Future*, a joint campaign with the Anti-Defamation League-New York/New Jersey Region.

My Voice, Our Future is a campaign about values and a response to the divisions driving us apart. Based on the journeys of young leaders from the Middle East and Africa, this unique campaign is inspiring change in America. By telling their stories on campuses and in communities, the AMEL Speakers are inspiring new perspectives, opening up new windows of dialogue, and serving as models for engagement over exclusion. Speaking engagements in 2018 took place, among others, at:

- Hofstra University
- Never Is Now Summit
- B'nai Keshet synagogue
- BBYO North East regional Camp
- No Place For Hate Conference
- International Refugee Day & Week events
- Drew University's Interfaith Fellowship Seminar
- ADL-National Leadership Conference
- Young African Leaders Diaspora Engagement Reception

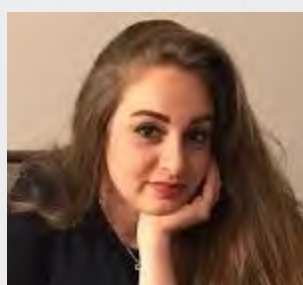


Introducing the AMEL Speakers



Bnyad Sharef and his family were among the first affected by the Travel Ban. While on their way to the U.S. with Special Immigrant Visas, they were turned away and sent back to Iraq. Fearing for their safety in Iraq because of Sharef's father's years of work for the U.S. government, they mobilized supporters in the U.S. until they got an exemption. When they finally landed in Nashville they were greeted by hundreds welcoming them to their new hometown.

Cedric Nwafor grew up on the streets of Bamenda, Cameroon, where he witnessed first-hand what poverty and hunger can do to any human's moral compass. Now in the U.S., Cedric has founded ROOTS Africa, a student-led organization that is bringing Americans and Africans together to collaboratively tackle some of the region's most pressing issues through food security initiatives.



Ruwan Al Rejoleh is a political analyst with a focus on geopolitics and extreme religious groups in the Middle East. Originally from Syria, Ruwan was born in Washington DC, grew up in Damascus and returned to the U.S. as a young professional. It was here that she built bridges with other young professionals from around the world, including a young Israeli, Mor, with whom she broke down barriers and built a lasting friendship.

Mor Yahalom is a Project Manager at the Marom Group. Born and raised in Israel, Mor began her career in the Israeli Defense Force before working for Members of Knesset and later for Ambassador (ret.) Daniel Kurtzer as his Research Assistant at Princeton. While participating in an exchange program, Mor built a friendship with Ruwan, with whom she shared a common vision of women's empowerment in the fields of peace and security.



Isaac Cudjoe's family left Ghana for the United States when he was just 3 years old. He quickly assimilated, attempting to become more American in hopes of fitting in. Decades later, while doing a M.A. at Brandeis, he created his first two-part documentary, "(Re)turn", exploring his own migration story and that of diaspora from 6 other countries. (Re)turn has now become a social movement of diaspora who are thinking critically about development projects and engagement with their home countries.

The AMEL Institute for MEA activists

AMEL's flagship program, the AMEL Institute, took shape in 2018 with the design of the pilot program and the first ever call-for-applications launched in November. The Institute is a fully online academy dedicated to providing **training to local activists (18-35 years old)** all over the MEA region who are taking action for human rights, democracy, and peace. With additional training in key organizing topics, they can do their activism more safely and effectively, become the leaders of pluralistic change movements, and transition governance processes across Africa and the Middle East.

To test our assumptions and approaches before building the full Institute, a pilot program will take place from February to May 2019 for a select group of 100 activists who will study human rights, activism safety, genocide and Holocaust education and prevention, democratic development, and peacebuilding. The online training will feature seasoned activists and practitioners, as well as experts from renowned institutions such as Stanford University. With results from the pilot, the program will be adjusted in preparation for the launch of more in-depth programs for 500 students per year beginning in Winter 2019/20.



The AMEL Institute Applicants

Over **250** applications received from civil society activists in more than **120** cities & towns in over **40** countries all across the Middle East & Africa:

- 54% from the MENA region
- 45% from sub-Saharan Africa
- 1% other

Each applicant was active in addressing issues such as:

- human rights violations
- gender inequality
- environmental discrimination
- economic injustices
- lack of rights and freedoms
- corruption
- violent extremism
- conflict

AMEL Nexus Working Groups

Throughout 2018, AMEL continued efforts to convene Working Groups to coordinate and elevate the voices of activists from key Middle Eastern and African countries within the United States. Bringing together young Yemeni, Syrian, Sudanese, and American activists, AMEL is helping to build coalitions that can raise credible and unique MEA voices in the halls of power in the U.S. and beyond. Some of the highlights of this work include:

- Raising awareness among policymakers and the public about the devastating consequences for **Yemeni** civilians of the attacks being carried out by the Saudi/Emirati-led coalition, of which the U.S. is part. Yemeni and American activists worked to elevate voices from the Yemen Peace Project and a coalition of groups who spearheaded advocacy efforts to end U.S. involvement in the conflict. The coalition got a much-needed boost when the War Powers Resolution, a bipartisan measure to withdraw the U.S. from the war in Yemen, passed the Senate in December.
- Convening and advising **Sudanese** diaspora in the U.S., who are creating and supporting civil society groups to build capacity for local democracy and activism in Sudan, as well as advocating for effective and just U.S. policy towards Sudan. These efforts took on a whole new dimension with the start of mass uprisings in Sudan in mid-December.



AMEL NEXUS: *the Power of Connection*



What happens when a Yemeni peace activist teams up with young American interfaith activists and a U.S. Senator? The extraordinary power of connection!

Senator Mark Kirk, author and activist Mohammed Al Samawi, and activists Megan Hallahan and Justin Hefter captivated audiences in Chicago in April 2018 with tales of how the power of networks, social media, diversity, and teamwork helped Yemeni peace Al Samawi flee death threats and a rapidly unfolding civil war in Spring 2015. With the help of American activists Hallahan, Hefter, and others, as well as support from U.S. Senators and State Department officials, Al Samawi escaped to safety. He eventually made his way to the United States, where he continues his peace and interfaith activism. Hallahan and Hefter continue to work together, becoming part of the founding team of AMEL as Executive Director and Vice-Chair of the Board respectively, and Senator Kirk serves on the Advisory Board.

AMEL NEXUS: Refugee Day on Capitol Hill

To mark International Refugee Day on June 20, 2018, AMEL was on Capitol Hill raising awareness for the plight of those forced to leave their homes. The day, which saw the participation of Policymakers **Sen. Ben Cardin**, **Rep. Ted Lieu** and many more, honored and elevated the stories of inspiring refugees who fled violence in Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Benin, and beyond.

Following the rally on the steps of the Capitol, AMEL President, Mohamed Abubakr, co-presented Oxfam's "Refugee Road," an interactive storytelling experience about the choices and challenges that refugees face.

The week surrounding Refugee Day continued with a Shabbat Salaam dinner of Interfaith Ventures in cooperation with Mercy Corps in New York to celebrate the resilience of refugees worldwide. The **interfaith dinner** featured Jewish and Muslim blessings, a 5-course Syrian/Iranian/Iraqi dinner prepared by refugee chefs, and the first-ever Yarrow Mamout Awards to champions who have worked to make a more inclusive American community that includes refugees. The keynote speaker of the evening was AMEL Speaker Bnyad Sharef from Iraq, who was among the first affected by the Travel Ban.

The week concluded with Sharef sharing his story and leading a **workshop on differences in perspectives** for international Fellows at Drew University's Center on Religion, Culture, and Conflict. The 30 Fellows - Indonesian, Pakistani, Saudi, South African, Nigerian, Egyptian, Israeli, and Palestinian emerging leaders - were part of a conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, leadership, and peacebuilding fellowship program.



AMEL NEXUS: Safeguarding Activists

Beyond connecting activists to one another and to peers and policymakers in the U.S., AMEL Nexus also works to connect activists with innovative tools and networks that can help them carry out their activism more safely and effectively. With this in mind, AMEL teamed up with **Google** for a unique partnership leveraging Google's strongest security. Originally developed for celebrities and politicians, Google Advanced Protection Program (APP) devices are essential for activists and journalists needing enhanced security for their digital communications.



AMEL began providing the APP devices to partner organizations such as Chapter Four Uganda, Seeds of Peace, the Muslim Jewish Conference, the Hermes Center for Transparency, and Digital Human Rights, among others. Additionally, AMEL took part in the annual Youth Summit at the World Bank's Headquarters in Washington, DC to further distribute the devices to young civil society activists. This year's Summit was designed to inspire fresh thinking on how to close the human capital gap and featured 400 young leaders from 117 countries.

Participants presented innovative ideas to contribute to shrinking the human capital gap and took part in sessions and workshops with experts from the World Bank Group, IBM, Intel, the United Nations, and Stanford, among many others.

AMEL was represented at the Summit by Cedric Nwafor, AMEL Speaker and Founder of ROOTS Africa. Forging connections with young leaders from across Africa, the Middle East and beyond, Nwafor presented the work of AMEL and ROOTS at the Summit's Expo and distributed the APP devices to qualifying activists.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT: Hofstra University



With a packed event on October 17th at Hofstra University in New York, the *My Voice, Our Future* campaign kicked-off with a bang! Co-hosted by **Hofstra Hillel** and **Hofstra NAACP**, the event gathered a diverse group of students to hear from AMEL Speaker Cedric Nwafor from Cameroon. Sharing his story of the human toll of hunger, Cedric spoke about combatting exclusion and hate through fighting food insecurity, and called on students to get involved in initiatives to reduce hunger on campus and in the community.

Along with campus partners, the Black Student Union, Collegiate Women of Color, and Peace Action Matters, the co-hosts Hillel and NAACP asked attendees to bring one non-perishable food item to the event to be donated to the local soup kitchen. The event concluded with a Q&A session, which included representatives of the campus food pantry that serves the students, staff, and faculty of Hofstra University who are at risk of food insecurity.

The *My Voice, Our Future* campaign is centered on uniting students and communities around the issues of common concern. Find out more on www.myvoiceourfuture.org

EVENT SPOTLIGHT: *The Muslim Next Door*



On April 11, 2018, AMEL joined the Muslim American Leadership Alliance (MALA) for a pre-air screening in Washington, DC of “The Muslim Next Door,” part of Katie Couric’s National Geographic docu-series, AMERICA INSIDE OUT. In the episode, Couric explores the stories, experiences and complexities of Muslim Americans in today’s America. The screening was followed by a panel of Muslim storytellers and young leaders, including AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr, who shared their own experiences as “the Muslim next door.” The discussion covered a wide range of topics, and highlighted challenges and opportunities for the Muslim community in the United States. The episode was also shared widely online and sparked enriching discussions and engagement among diverse audiences.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT: No Place for Hate



At the *No Place for Hate* Recognition Ceremony in New York on May 25, 2018, AMEL received the **Making a Difference Award** for "Extraordinary Leadership and Vision to Help Build a Safer and More Respectful Community" from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

The ceremony brought together over 1,000 students from 153 k-12 schools across the greater New York City area that had completed the No Place For Hate anti-bias and anti-bullying program. By participating in the initiative, schools created a safer learning environments, promoted unity and respect, and ultimately reduced and brought awareness to the issues of bullying, name-calling, and expressions of bias. The ceremony's keynote speaker was AMEL Speaker Cedric Nwafor,

a Cameroonian-American social entrepreneur and Founder of Roots Africa, who lit up the stage with an impassioned motivational speech against exclusion and hate.



Event Spotlight: Mandela Day & Summit

On July 18, 2018, AMEL teamed up with the DC Mayor's Office on African Affairs, Howard University, and the Washington Mandela Fellowship for Young African Leaders for the **4th Annual Young African ConneXions Summit: "Living the Legacy,"** commemorating the life and work of Nelson Mandela.

Young leaders from Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and 15 other countries across Africa (the Fellows) came together with representatives from the Municipality, the University, the African diaspora community, policymakers, and civic leaders to discuss advocacy, volunteerism, leadership, and community engagement, all inspired by Madiba. Following the Summit, AMEL joined the UNESCO Center for Peace and Howard University to treat the Fellows to a special dinner to celebrate **Nelson Mandela's 100th birthday** and to draw inspiration from his life and legacy.

Later in July, AMEL joined the **Mandela Washington Fellows Summit**, an annual conference to build relationships that support and expand U.S.-Africa cooperation around shared goals the continent. The Summit brought together 700 African Fellows for leadership and networking sessions, an Expo featuring 100+ organizations engaged with Africa and a Congressional Forum. The Summit was the culmination of the Fellowship program that brought young African leaders for six weeks of academic study and leadership training at 38 higher education institutions across the United States.



EVENT SPOTLIGHT: The Agape March & Rally Against White Supremacy

When Jason Kessler announced the "Unite the Right 2" rally to be held on August 12, 2018 in front of the White House to mark the 1st anniversary of Charlottesville, we knew that constructive and non-violent alternatives would be needed. We joined an inclusive grassroots effort dedicated to the values of love, dignity and unity against hate: the Agape March and Rally. Coordinated by Rejuve-A-Nation, the Agape March was a 250-mile, 8-day journey from New York City to Washington D.C. that engaged with communities along the way, dialoguing about divisions and how they could be overcome. The march culminated with a rally at the Lincoln Memorial where a diverse group of activists celebrated one another's differences and stood together in unity against hate.



Standing where Martin Luther King famously said "I Have a Dream," Rabbi Jack Moline blew his Shofar and shared beautiful reflections on the events of the day in relation to the Jewish month of Elul dedicated to repentance, mercy, and spiritual progress. Black Lives Matter activists called for unity, love, and meaningful engagement between all communities of America to heal racial divides and promote harmony and prosperity. A young Jewish woman shared a heart-wrenching story of living a nightmare when she became the target of a neo-Nazi group in her town. AMEL's President, Mohamed Abubakr, called on all Americans to use the power of the vote, which refugees and immigrants like him do not yet have, to bring back civility and pluralism.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT: *The People's Supper*



Leading up to the midterm elections in Fall 2018, AMEL was approached to Co-Host the Washington DC People's Supper, a bipartisan dinner event bringing together people of all backgrounds and opinions. Drawing a diverse crowd from all over Washington DC, Virginia, and Maryland to the Sixth & I synagogue, the People's Supper was a huge success, with more than 100 people breaking bread together and rediscovering common humanity. The dinner was part of a nation-wide series seeking to repair the breach in interpersonal relationships across political, ideological, and identity differences, leading to more civil discourse. The People's Supper is a collaborative project led by Hollaback!, The Dinner Party, and the Faith Matters Network, with the support of the Righteous Persons Foundation .



Looking Ahead to 2019

AMEL Leadership Institute

2019 will see the completion of the pilot program of the AMEL Institute for 100 human and civil rights activists from across the MEA region. Program adjustments will be made based on pilot program results and expanded programs of the AMEL Leadership Institute will be launched in Winter 2019/20. The Institute will target 500 activists annually, providing them with online training to fill key skill and knowledge gaps in relation to safe and effective human rights activism, Holocaust education, genocide prevention, democratic development, and peacebuilding, among other topics.

AMEL Speakers Bureau & AMEL Nexus

The AMEL Speakers Bureau will continue to deploy young leaders of MEA origins to inspire diverse audiences across the U.S. with their bridge-building stories and initiatives. The AMEL Nexus program will continue to forge strategic connections between MEA activists and their peers and policymakers in the United States and beyond. 2019 will also see greater connections of MEA activists to tools, resources, and networks that can help keep them safe, including Google's Advanced Protection Program.

AMEL Incubator

Many AMEL activists and partners have started their own initiatives serving the MEA region and related communities in the U.S. Leveraging their different backgrounds, experiences, and areas of expertise, they are driving inclusive and meaningful change on some of today's most difficult challenges. AMEL is thus seeking to build an Incubator that will draw upon the experiences of our team in movement and organization-building to provide changemakers the support they need. This will include mentoring and fiscal sponsorship so that they can develop their unique initiatives into successful and sustainable organizations or social businesses.

Thank You to Our Supporters!

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The Libitzky Family Foundation

**The Goodman Family Supporting Foundation
of the Jewish Community Foundation of the
East Bay**

**The Rob & Eileen Ruby Fund of the Jewish
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Thank You to Our Partners!

Chapter Four Uganda
Millennial Action Project
Anti-Defamation League
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The People's Supper
Agape March
Afrika Youth Movement
The Yemen Peace Project
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