

35th Niwano Peace Prize: Adyan Foundation for Diversity, Solidarity and Human Dignity in Lebanon and internationally.

This year, the 35th Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to the Adyan Foundation, whose mission is to strengthen citizenship and coexistence in diverse societies, and to create contexts and platforms for interfaith spiritual solidarity. The five founders of Adyan in 2006, Fadi Daou, Nayla Tabbara, Mireille Matar, Tony Sawma, and Samah Halwany, are followers of different denominations of Christianity and Islam and have varying professional expertise; their unity within their diversity has been Adyan's strongest asset. Notably, the organisation developed the Building Resilience and Reconciliation programme for children and educators, which offers a guide to peace and reconciliation for those affected by the Syrian war; this program was qualified by the UN Special envoy for global education, Gordon Brown, as being the real antidote to ISIS. The Niwano Peace Foundation wishes to commend and support Adyan's continued service to global peace-building by awarding it the 35th Niwano Peace Prize.

In 2016, a decade after being founded, Adyan had gained more than 3000 members and had benefitted 35 000 people directly in 29 countries. It achieved this mammoth influence in Lebanon, the Middle East, and beyond through its four departments: the Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management, the Community Engagement department, the Media department, and the Rashad Centre for Cultural Governance. Adyan's team uses these four branches to access different spheres of society and implement various cultural, educational, social, policymaking, advocacy, and spiritual programmes in ways that will be accessible and appropriate to each group. This is one of the major achievements of the Adyan foundation: the ability to conduct academic research and affect policy change without forgoing its focus on change at grassroots level.

Adyan envisions a world where diversity between individuals and communities is lived as an enrichment, generating mutual understanding, intercultural citizenship, creative development, sustainable peace and spiritual solidarity. (Quote from adyanfoundation.org)

This quotation encompasses the central task that Adyan sets before itself: to bring citizens to the understanding that diversity is an asset and strength, rather than a liability or weakness. This is particularly pertinent in the Lebanese context, but also globally. Nations all over the world are tightening borders and pushing away those who are perceived to be different. In their own leadership structure, Adyan demonstrates that diversity, when well-managed, brings strength and creative possibilities.

Moreover, Adyan emphasises the *spiritual* responsibility to be an active and engaged citizen, within the framework of what they called "Religious Social Responsibility". Recognizing the 'other' as a richness is not only a social requirement, but also a spiritual mandate. When understood at its deepest level, becoming active citizens brings each person closer to their own spirituality. This is a message that can truly transform a society to move from separatism, judgement, and violence towards togetherness, openness, and peace.

In 2013, Adyan responded to the Syrian crisis by offering interfaith mediation dialogue and peace education to vulnerable Syrian citizens both in Lebanon and Syria through a project called Building Resilience and Reconciliation (BRR). The courses trained Syrian educators to provide peaceful and reconciliatory approaches in formal and non-formal schools. The hope is that Syrian children and teens will develop alternative strategies for building peace, which will prevent them from entering the cycle of violence. In 2016, Adyan started an intensive work in Iraq, with Journalists and Civil Society activists, to build their capacities in spreading the values of inclusive citizenship and interreligious solidarity, and healing the society from its ISIS traumatism.

Although it is just over a decade old, Adyan has been the recipient of significant awards. In 2011 Adyan received the Civil Peace Award in Lebanon for its work in reconciliation and peacebuilding. Most recently in 2013 Adyan was awarded the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Republic of Azerbaijan prize for “Living together peacefully in a diverse world’. This prize was awarded specifically for its Alwan schools project. Adyan has worked together with Lebanese ministry of education to implement a citizenship and peace programme through community service in local public and private schools. In addition, in 2011, Adyan initiated the *National Strategy for Citizenship and Coexistence Education* in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) to reform educational curricula in schools based on the concept of Inclusive Citizenship.

Looking forward, Adyan plans to continue to develop strategies whereby sectarian societies can develop into multicultural communities and become resilient against extremism. Adyan will focus its efforts on Lebanon, expanding to the Levant, from there to the Arabic world, and finally to the globe as a whole. Adyan’s influence will resonate in concentric rings around Lebanon; a nation with a complex history of violence and hatred is gradually becoming an example of the potential for religious groups, social organisations, and government to work together to build peace and foster multi-faith collaboration.

Adyan’s work is so varied that it is impossible to summarise in such a short form as this. Suffice to say, the Niwano Peace Foundation commends and supports Adyan for its positive and spiritual influence in the Middle East. The NPF is honoured to bestow on Adyan this prize for its far-reaching and creative work aimed at building peace and fostering inter-religious coexistence.

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