

## **Education as a Human Right: An Evening with Hanan Al Hroub**

### **The Global Teacher Prize 2016**

Her Speech at Harvard Graduate School of Education 2016

Good evening. Sorry about my English, I promise next year I will be good. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to speak with you today in one of the world's greatest institution dedicated to the power of learning. When I look around I think of all the minds through history that have been transformed within these four walls. ... We must remember that universities are one of our most precious places, and they must always be treasured.

First I want to thank the Harvard Graduate School of Education for hosting this important event. You are helping us to shine light on teachers; something the world needs more than ever before. I would like to start by telling you a little more about my own teacher journey.

I grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Balham. In 1979 when I was a student in grade two, our new teacher introduced herself by saying, "my name is Julia from Balham." As we introduced our names, she explained the meaning of our names. That made us feel very special; she won our hearts through her tenderness. I couldn't wait to see her the next morning. She was our source of inspiration. Every time I looked at her I said to myself, "I want to be like her." Many years later, when I became a teacher and stood in front of a classroom for the first time, I introduced myself by saying, "my name is Hanna and it means affection." I then explained the meaning of all the children names in my classroom and I hope it made them feel special too.

The spark that got me on the road to become a teacher was when my own children developed trauma after witnessing a horrific accident on their way back from school. They became withdrawn and afraid to go back to school and very aggressive towards each other. Their academic work also suffered and there was no professional help available. Feeling very alone, I researched in libraries and bookshops and taught my children at home. A corner of my house became their new classroom. I started playing with my children to help them open up. We used balloons, puppets, anything to bring out their inner child. Eventually they returned to school.

From then I made my purpose in life to help traumatized children in Palestinian public schools. I now teach at same Khan High School in Palestine. Here in Palestine, we live in a very tense situation, which makes our education mission very complicated. Here children witness violence first hand or are exposed to it by the news reports and social media. This suffering gets into he classroom and leads to frustration. The atmosphere is not normal, like classrooms here or around the world. We see the sufferings in our students' eyes everyday.

From my first day as a teacher, I embraced "No to Violence" and developed the play and learning approach that I started in my home. I decided that teachers, like artists, must create an environment that frees the child and their imagination from their daily trauma and helps them shape it in a loving and beautiful way.

Due to lack of funding I need to be creative, to bring my lessons to live. I have built reading corners and chairs for students from discarded vegetable boxes... Mathematics is aided with plastic cups, plates and clothes. The only limit is your imagination. This has helped me produce positive outcomes such as

eliminating aggression and promoting dialogue and cooperation. It also reduces students' ego and selfishness.

In addition, I have an open discussion with all my students about their attitudes towards each other. I give them the opportunities to express themselves out loud. We encourage teamwork so they acquire the belief that dialogue and listening to others can lead to better outcomes ... I am proud that the Ministry of Education in Palestine is applying these principles. The students and the teachers should not be overloaded. It should be the first priority to provide a safe, attractive and fun educational environment. We want our children to live by love and peace, just like other children around the world are able to do. Whatever difficulties life throws at us, we can overcome them if we give our children safe and hopeful future....

Around the world, teaching is not as valued as other professions, but teachers are the real powers of the world. It is teachers who lights the spark of curiosity; it is teachers who point and guide the way; it is teachers who take the next generation in their hands and shape them. I still can't believe the magical moment when Pope Francis announced my name as the winner of The Global Teacher Prize 2016. It still feels like a dream.

Since winning the prize, I have travelled to Europe, South America and now the great city of Cambridge. I have visited many schools and universities and listened to countless students around the world. But my greatest joy comes from speaking to super hero teachers working in the most difficult situations. These teachers have taught me so much; they can teach us all so much. Finally, I must tell you that I was fortunate to meet His Holiness Pope Francis earlier this year. When Pope Francis announced the winner of the global prize, he said, "a child has the right to play. Part of education is to teach children how to play because you learn how to be social through games as well as learn the joy of life." He is wise. Children must always play and always smile. Thank you very much.  
(Speech ends; interview begins)