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Bridging the divide

By Katelynn Northam

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In an ever-shrinking world, Canada's role in international development is becoming increasingly significant. This is the focus of *Bridges that Unite*, a traveling exhibit that opened earlier this month at Pier 21. The exhibition celebrates Canada's part in global development, as well as our country's 25-year partnership with the Aga Khan Development Network.

Soulafa al-Abbasi is one of 21 student tour guides for the exhibit. A recent graduate of Dalhousie University and originally from Syria, she received her undergraduate degree in economics from an American university in Cairo, Egypt. After moving to Halifax in 2003, she entered the masters program at Dalhousie in development economics.

While doing research for her thesis, Ms. al-Abbasi began a nine-month fellowship with the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, (the Canadian branch of the Aga Khan Development Network,) returning to Cairo to work for a microfinance institution.

She describes it as an eye-opening experience: "Where I was working was an area I probably never would have visited while living in Cairo. Going to an American university (in Cairo), it's a very bubbled society. You're so separated from reality."

It is this reality of widespread poverty that the Aga Khan Foundation Canada and the rest of the Agha Khan Development Network have been struggling to overcome since its inception. Its work stretches all over Asia and Africa, focusing on different issues related to economic development, social development, and culture.

The exhibit itself, which specifically looks at Canadian areas of involvement such as education, culture, and Afghanistan, shows how our unique approach to development has benefited countries around the world.

Ms. al-Abbasi points to Canada's ability to function effectively as a society despite our diverse composition as one of these benefits.



Soulafa al-Abbasi, a recent Dal grad, is profiled in the exhibition as a Canadian "Agent of Change."

“Definitely that’s one thing that Canada can teach people...how to live cohesively.”

Ms. al-Abbasi is now a Canadian citizen, and with her Masters degree completed, she hopes to continue her work in development, merging her academic experience from the West with her practical work experience in developing nations.

“It’s never-ending, Canada’s role. We are so privileged in so many ways, and we don’t realize it until we are deprived of these privileges.”

Bridges that Unite runs to November 4th at Pier 21, 1055 Marginal Road. Admission is free.

LINKS: [Bridges that Unite](#) | [The Aga Khan Development Network](#) | [Pier 21](#)

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