



**Annual Report**  
**2016-17**



# Message from the President

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Growing up as an activist in Sudan, the work I've done to help people and communities in danger has simultaneously been a source of joy and bitterness, mixing immense fulfillment with intense stress. But above all, it made me feel very isolated yet, at the same time, incredibly connected; isolated from the community of the average conforming citizens of my country, but incredibly connected to like-minded peaceful rebels within my country of birth and beyond.

Throughout the long and often bumpy activism journey that led me to this moment, writing the foreword for AMEL's first Annual Report, I was lucky enough to always find the support I needed. Older activists showed me the ropes, friends lent me shoulders to cry on, supporters kept the work going and crowds celebrated our little victories. But most peace and human rights activists - the brave young women and men who are fighting the good fight in Africa, the Middle East, and here in the U.S. - are not nearly this lucky. AMEL is our attempt to remedy that.

We have had a great first year - and not only according to the metrics of a young start-up organization. Seldom does a civil society organization get the floor on Capitol Hill to add its voice to foreign policy discussions of the greatest country on earth. AMEL did in 2017, and before the organization even publicly launched! This streak of "good luck" continued throughout the year, including surpassing our fundraising goals, forging partnerships with top caliber partners, and developing unique programming. I say "good luck", but luck had very little to do with it, rather it was the innovation and hard work of a group of thoughtful, committed young leaders determined to change the world. I'm so excited to see the fruits of our labor continue to bloom brightly throughout 2018.

Thank you for your interest and support,  
Mohamed Abubakr

# Putting AMEL on the Map

A SNEAK PEEK AT AMEL - MLK WEEKEND 2017



Celebrating MLK Weekend, members of the founding team and early supporters gathered for a first look at the African Middle Eastern Leadership Project (AMEL) at At&T Park in San Francisco on January 15, 2017. We were honored with words of welcome from Giants President & CEO, Larry Baer, before sharing AMEL's unique co-creation story, which saw a diverse and interfaith team of young activists, law students and seasoned advisors working together leading up to AMEL's founding in November 2016. At the center of it all was Mohamed Abubakr, AMEL President and life-long activist, who presented the new organization's mission: to empower millennial leaders from the Middle East and Africa (MEA) to create pluralistic, human rights-respecting societies, to advocate in pursuit of those goals, and to connect MEA activists with power brokers in the U.S. AMEL Chair, Gabriel Kohan, Board Members, Steven Olikara and Richard Weir, and Advisory Board Members, Prof. Larry Diamond and Anne Pence, concluded the event, reflecting on the importance and added-value of AMEL.

## NATIONAL LAUNCH OF AMEL - JULY 19, 2017

Following an initial start-up phase, the official public launch of AMEL was held in Washington, D.C. at the headquarters of Covington & Burling LLP on July 19, 2017. Featuring remarks by Sen. Mark Kirk and a keynote address by Amb. Dennis Ross, the launch was an overwhelming success



with palpable energy and inspiration filling the room. Joining AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr in introducing the event and organization were Mark Donig from Jones Day, Anne Pence from Covington and AMEL Board Member Jenna Gebel. Gathering in support of AMEL's mission to empower young generation to change the face of human rights, the event brought together more than 150 guests, including Members of Congress, diplomats, scholars, business leaders, lawyers, activists and journalists from all over the United States as well as the Middle East and Africa.





**"You [AMEL] remind me what are the things that I consider to be important. And I hope that everyone who is**

**here will recognize that you're looking at not only a special person, but you're looking at an interesting collection of younger people who've decided they are not going to settle, they are not going to accept; they are not going to wait for the world to change, they are going to change the world."**

**Ambassador Dennis Ross**

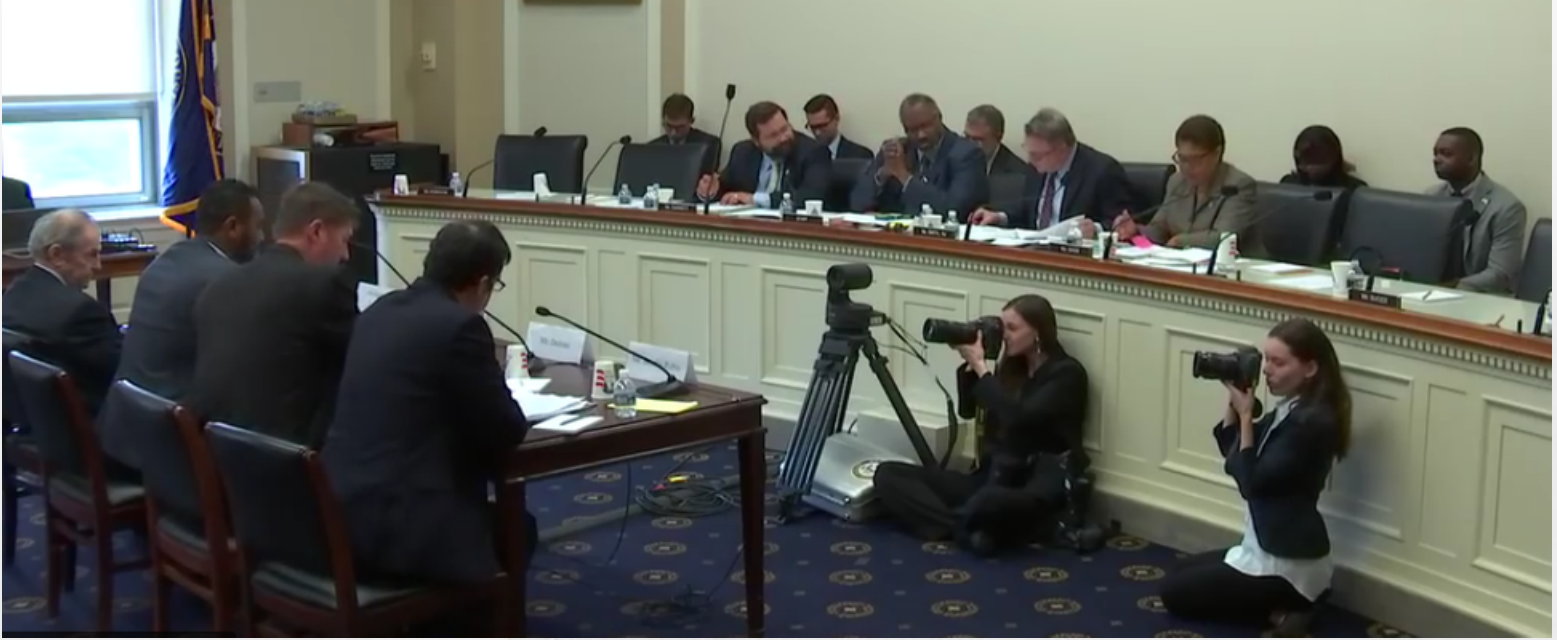
**Counselor & William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Member of the AMEL Board of Advisors**

# Coalescing & Elevating Activist Voices from the Middle East & Africa

**TESTING THE MODEL: *Bringing the Sudanese Civil Society Perspective to Congress - April 26, 2017***

Bringing the perspective of a Sudanese human rights activist, AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr shared his story with the U.S. House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and Global Health on April 26, 2017. One of only four witnesses, he was called to testify at the Subcommittee's "Questionable Case for Easing Sudan Sanctions" hearing alongside representatives from the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Sudan Relief Fund, and the Sentry (an initiative of the ENOUGH Project and Not On Our Watch).





Mohamed provided a moving account to the Subcommittee, which was co-chaired by Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA). He spoke from the heart about what drove him to become an activist at the age of only fourteen. Mohamed also highlighted the tangible and intangible impacts of the values and actions of the international community - particularly the United States - on the very civil society that holds the key to a more peaceful and democratic future for Sudan. Drawing upon his first-hand experience as a human rights activist for more than a decade in Darfur, Khartoum and throughout Sudan before moving to the U.S., Mohamed sought to bring attention to both the challenges and aspirations of young Sudanese activists who are seeking to make the country and the region more free, stable and peaceful.

The testimony was the culmination of months of coordination by Mohamed with the most active organizations in the Sudan policy space to catalyze them around a shared vision and plan for putting human rights at the center of the debate over lifting Sudan sanctions. This experience thus served as a proof of concept and successful model for AMEL's Nexus program, which focuses on the convening and strategic networking and collaboration among young activists from the Middle East and Africa with American peers, influencers, and policy-makers.

## REPLICATING THE MODEL: *Building AMEL Nexus Working Groups on Syria and Yemen*

Following the successful Sudan pilot, AMEL convened a Yemen Working Group (YWG) and a Syria Working Group (SWG) to more effectively coordinate and elevate the voices of activists from these critical hot-spots. While there are vibrant Yemeni and Syrian communities full of young activists in the United States with links to their peers back home, their perspectives are seldom heard in the American policy space. AMEL Working Groups thus bring these fresh and candid voices together to discuss the tough issues facing their countries and the wider region as the first step towards bringing these credible and unique voices to bear on relevant advocacy efforts.

In particular, AMEL brought together a select group of **Yemeni** activists as well as a handful of American activists for a series of meetings during 2017 to discuss the war crippling the country as well as ways to contribute to the relevant policy space. Composed primarily of young professionals who had been journalists and human rights activists in Yemen, the participants brought to the Working Group a unique understanding of the situation on the ground and ideas for advocacy that would impact the lives of the Yemeni population.

Likewise, during the second half of 2017, a series of meetings took place in Washington DC with eight **Syrian** activists who gathered to share experiences and forge paths of collaboration. The meetings took stock of the current Syria policy space, including the identification of allies and spoilers and their positions, the current advocacy landscape and opportunities for action. While the challenges in both countries are daunting, by convening groups of Syrian and Yemeni activists and developing ways to strategically link them with American activists and leaders, AMEL is pioneering a fresh approach to the region and the policies that impact it.



# Spreading the Voices of AMEL



Speaking tours have been a cornerstone of our efforts to spread our mission and create momentum, networks and partnerships in support of it, particularly among American students and young professionals. Speaking at more than 25 events, AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr has been hosted at universities, colleges, seminars and gatherings across the country, including events organized by Hillel, Muslim Student Association, the Anti-Defamation League and the Office of African Affairs of the Mayor of Washington, DC, among many others.

Addressing audiences totaling upwards of 5,000 people, Mohamed has shared his unique experiences as an activist who mobilized humanitarian aid in response to the genocide in Darfur, provided critical assistance to women and LGBTQ individuals throughout Sudan and engaged in Arab-Israeli peace-building initiatives, among other efforts. These powerful personal stories and vibrant Q&A discussions have inspired audiences at Stanford, UC Berkeley, Claremont, Oberlin, Ohio State, University of Michigan, Washington State, Boise State, University of North Carolina and University of Texas.

Seeing the power of sharing first-hand experiences of an experienced young activist, AMEL began developing its Speakers Bureau program to replicate and scale-up this successful model. Bringing fresh voices from the Middle East and Africa to audiences across the United States, AMEL will leverage the power of storytelling to dispel misconceptions, build bridges and spark dialogue towards positive action.

## SPEAKING TOUR SPOTLIGHT: *Young African ConneXions Summit in Washington DC*

On July 14, 2017, AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr delivered the closing remarks at the 3rd Annual Young African ConneXions Summit (YAX). Organized by the Mayor's Office on African Affairs of the District of Columbia, the summit was held in partnership with Howard University, the DC Commission on African Affairs and the Washington Mandela Fellowship for Young African Leaders.

Mohamed's address, which centered on "Young Africans' Participation in Shaping U.S. Foreign Policy" was well-received by over 500 Mandela Fellows in attendance, who were joined by hundreds of students, faculty, and the general public for a mega-event entitled "Strengthening Diaspora Partnerships and Involvement".

The event was a lead-up to the Annual Mandela Day of Service on Saturday, July 15, 2017 when the Mayor's Office of African Affairs was joined by volunteers at the Anacostia Park Skating Rink for 67 minutes of community service to commemorate the life and legacy of Nelson Mandela.



## SPEAKING TOUR SPOTLIGHT: *Silicon Valley*

For activists across the MEA region, Silicon Valley represents the birthplace of the technologies that have made our world into a global village, breaking down distances and boundaries to allow people to communicate and coalesce around common interests. But these very technologies are also being co-opted by those who want to repress human rights, exploit fears and sow division and conflict. AMEL thus actively seeks to spread across Silicon Valley the voices and ideas of MEA activists who are counteracting these trends, promoting that which unites us rather than divides us, as well as greater rights and dignity for all. Like the entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley, these creative and courageous activists are disrupting the system, using innovative approaches to change the game.



With this in mind, AMEL President, Mohamed Abubakr, and Executive Director, Megan Hallahan, visited the area in October 2017, engaging in meetings with Google, Stanford, Nexus, and other Silicon Valley staples, as well as speaking at several events. In particular, Mohamed gave a lecture at UC Berkeley School of Law and a talk at Stanford University's Crothers Hall. Mohamed also gave the keynote address at an AMEL event for Bay Area leaders and supporters, hosted by AMEL champion Moses Libitzky and moderated by the former Middle East bureau chief for the Washington Post, Janine Zacharia.

## SPEAKING TOUR SPOTLIGHT: *Peace December*

On December 18, 2017, the NextGen Outreach Network of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) hosted a special event entitled "We Are The Change: How Young People Are Leading Movements for Civil Rights and Peace". The event featured AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr speaking alongside civil society leaders Diandra Barnwell, a social media influencer committed to furthering human rights and equality, Fayth Henderson of the 67th Precinct Clergy Council, and ADL-NY Senior Associate Director Melanie Robbins.



The enriching and inspiring event was organized by ADL together with Peace December and the New York Peace Coalition and with the support of the New York Dominican Bar Association. Part of an annual celebration of December as a month of peace, the remarks of the panelists and the ensuing discussion focused on the power of youth and leadership in the effort to create positive change.

# **The AMEL Speakers Bureau**

During the second half of 2017, AMEL focused efforts on developing a core program to spread the voices of activists from the MEA region across the United States: the AMEL Speakers Bureau. Inspired by the success of AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr's speaking tours to campuses, community centers and events across the country, the Speakers Bureau will train other inspiring young leaders from the MEA region to likewise tell their stories of courage and activism in order to convene and inspire diverse audiences.

## ***Partnership with the Anti-Defamation League***

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Kicking off the AMEL Speakers Bureau was a joint campaign - My Voice, Our Future - with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to train and deploy AMEL Speakers across New York state. The ADL was founded in 1913 with the mission "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all." Now the nation's premier civil rights and human relations agency fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, ADL defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all. A leader in the development of materials, programs and services, ADL builds bridges of communication, understanding and respect among diverse groups, carrying out its mission through a network of 27 Regional Offices in the U.S. and abroad.

## ***Public Speaking Training Program***

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As the initial step in this program, AMEL developed during the last quarter of 2017 a unique blended learning program that pairs online training in speech-crafting and public speaking basics with in-person workshops on public speaking mechanics, speech refinement and engagement with audiences. This training program was developed together with Lior Shoham, who has coached CEOs, entrepreneurs, diplomats and more for the past eight years, and Eduardo Placer, renowned motivational speaker, community-builder and public speaking coach.

## Identifying AMEL Speakers

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With partnership and program design complete, AMEL launched in December 2017 a call-for-applications to recruit the first cohort of five AMEL Speakers (young activists from the MEA region who are based in the U.S., including new immigrants and refugees). To cast a wide net, the call was spread across AMEL's networks as well as through partners such as the ADL, the Afrika Youth Movement, the YaLa Young Leaders movement and Atlas Corps, among many others. Already in the final days of 2017, many top-notch applications had

been received. And with recruitment continuing into the first days of 2018, the program is sure to suffer from its own success and face the very tough decisions of selecting only five from among the many unique and impressive candidates.

Looking ahead to the first half of 2018, the top five applicants will be selected and enrolled in the AMEL online training program in public speaking and speech-crafting, which will culminate in a 3-day workshop in New York. Following the training, speakers will be deployed through the **"My Voice, Our Future"** campaign of the AMEL Speakers Bureau, in partnership with ADL-New York, to speak in houses of worship, communities and universities across New York state, with special emphasis on areas that have witnessed a rise in white supremacy, anti-Muslim bigotry, and other hate crimes and campus tensions. During the course of 2018, ten speaking engagements are planned across the state, as well as a special event in Detroit and the initial planning for replication far beyond New York.

# Looking Ahead: Other 2018 Programming

## AMEL Leadership Institute

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2018 will also see the development and launch of the AMEL Leadership Institute, a program that will target activists based in the Middle East and Africa (500 annually), providing them with online training to fill key skill- and knowledge-gaps. In particular, training will focus on genocide prevention, Holocaust education, civic engagement, conflict management, leading effective campaigns and, most importantly, how to do human rights work safely under repressive regimes. The Institute will draw upon educational resources from ADL, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Enough Project, Stanford University and other partners, as well as creating new resources together with experienced activists, practitioners and educators.

## AMEL Nexus

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Our AMEL Nexus program will continue to forge strategic connections between MEA activists and their peers and policymakers in the U.S. We will also begin to develop a Nexus Fellowship program to bring activists from the MEA region to the United States to cultivate relationships with lawmakers, academics, diplomats, and their American peers. Selected from among top-performing trainees of the AMEL Institute, Fellows will be brought to the U.S. for additional training and experience working side-by-side with policymakers and Silicon Valley executives to reshape the United States' foreign policy vis-a-vis the Middle East and Africa, and to leverage technology to serve the advancement of human rights. Meanwhile, partnerships with groups with similar missions and activities, such as the Enough Project, Yemen Peace Project, the Muslim American Leadership Alliance, and Afrika Youth Movement, among many others, will be further explored and developed.

# AMEL in the News

AMEL events and activities have been featured in local, national and international media outlets throughout 2017. Two AMEL op-eds were also published, including a July 12th op-ed in The Hill entitled "Comprehensive dropping of sanctions against Sudan would be a terrible mistake" written by Richard Weir (member of the Truman National Security Project's Defense Council and AMEL board member) together with AMEL President Mohamed Abubakr. On October 20, 2017 the Idaho Statesman published Mohamed Abubakr's op-ed "Restoring Humanity to Humanitarian Aid".



## George Clooney's pressure group to warn against removing sanction on Sudan

The director of an American pressure group opposed to the easing of sanctions on Sudan is expected to testify before the US Congress Wednesday, the Congress website revealed...

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Friday, 28 April 2017

## The Questionable Case for Lifting Sudan Sanctions: Testimonies of Sudan Resistance Leaders-Part 1

General Abakar M. Abdallah of Sudan United Movement



## Idaho Statesman

OBITUARIES LOCAL NEWS SPORTS IDAHO POLITICS

## Restoring Humanity to Humanitarian Aid

BY MOHAMED ABUBAKR

October 20, 2017 12:32 PM  
Updated October 25, 2017 04:09 PM

**Editor's note:** Mohamed Abubakr is one of the speakers at Boise State's Frank Church Conference Monday, which kicked off Human Rights Week. Get details on Thursday's event below.



## Comprehensive dropping of sanctions against Sudan would be a terrible mistake

By Richard Weir and Mohamed Abubakr, Opinion Contributors — 07/12/17 01:30 PM

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White House struggles with fallout over \$130,000 payment ADMINISTRATION — 2M 385 AGO

Don't let the Trump administration put clean car standards in reverse OPINION — 6M 165 AGO



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**SCENE/THE OTHER NIGHT — in DC:** The African Middle Eastern Leadership Project (AMEL) is now an official NGO after hosting its national launch event at the offices of Covington and Burling in DC on Wednesday night. The AMEL Project, which trains and empowers the next generation of human rights activists in the Middle East and Africa, is led by a young Sudanese Muslim activist named Mohamed Abubakr, who told the audience that he was willing to defy the Sudanese government's laws by becoming friends with Israelis. Those laws can carry a punishment up to a death sentence. Mohamed's willingness to build bridges also inspired Senator Mark Kirk and Ambassador Dennis Ross, who are both on AMEL's advisory board, to speak at the launch event.

**Ambassador Dennis Ross:** "You [AMEL] remind me what are the things that I consider to be important. And I hope that everyone who is here will recognize that you're looking at not only a special person, but you're looking at an interesting collection of younger people who've decided they are not going to settle; they are not going to accept. They are not going to wait for the world to change, they are going to change the world."

الجمعية السودانية لحقوق الإنسان

## ناشط سوداني يطلق 'مشروع القيادة الأفريقية الشرق أوسطية'

حريات وحقوق إنسان 25 يوليو 2017



حزب  
عرض التعليقات  
طباعة المقال



# Key Milestones Achieved

Brought a Sudanese civil society perspective to Congress

Publicly launched the organization together with 150 diverse leaders and supporters

Reached more than 5,000 people during speaking engagements across the country

Designed Speakers Bureau program to elevate voices of African and Middle Eastern diaspora

Began building an online community, with social media content reaching 191,000 in only a few months

Opened office on Connecticut Avenue in Washington DC with first two full-time staff members

Exceeded fundraising goals and nearly tripled the budget

Convened Working Groups on Syria and Yemen

Launched 1st call for applications for the AMEL Speakers Bureau

# ***Thank You to Our Partners and Supporters***

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**Mohamed Abubakr**  
President

**Megan Hallahan**  
Executive Director

**Gabriel Kohan** *Board Chair*  
**Jenna Gebel** *Board Member*  
**Justin Hefter** *Board Member*  
**Steven Olikara** *Board Member*  
**Richard Weir** *Board Member*



## Board of Advisors:

**Mohammed Al-Samawi** *Yemeni Peace & Interfaith Activist and Author*

**Prof. Larry Diamond** *Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and at Stanford University, Founding Co-Editor of the Journal of Democracy*

**Steve Feldstein** *Associate Professor and Frank & Bethine Church Chair of Public Affairs at Boise State University*

**Mark Kirk** *former Senator from Illinois*

**Nicholas Opiyo** *Activist, Lawyer & Founder of Chapter Four Uganda*

**Anne Pence** *Senior International Advisor, Covington & Burling LLP*

**Amb. Dennis Ross** *Counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*

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