The right to education is a fundamental human right and basic to human freedom. If peace is sought, then freedom, justice, education and development are necessary. It is the responsibility of governments, organizations, and ordinary people to defend the universal right to education and to demand its realization.

—Birzeit University Right to Education Campaign
The Middle East Children’s Alliance provides scholarships to approximately 150 students each year who are working toward undergraduate degrees at eleven Palestinian universities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Many of the students are refugees, the majority are women, and all face significant financial hardship.

They work very hard to reach their academic and professional goals. The scholarship program began in 2004 as part of MECA’s deep commitment to supporting education at every level, beginning with preschool. Many of the scholarship recipients have grown-up participating in programs run by MECA’s Palestinian partners. Our staff and partners have seen them struggle under Israeli occupation. And we’ve seen them gain skills and confidence, giving back to their communities as volunteers, teaching younger children, and becoming leaders. MECA partners are key to scholarship recruitment and the education the students gain enables them to give back much more.

Getting a scholarship in the name of the late Shireen Abu Aqleh is beyond an honor for me. When I was younger, I always wanted to study Arabic Literature and Journalism, but as the time got closer to deciding on my major, I found myself going more towards another expressive form—Graphic Design and Arts. On a personal level it helps me express myself, my thoughts, and my feelings better. On a collective level, and that’s part of the reason I chose major, it’ll help me express my people’s story. Like Shireen, I’ll be a storyteller who tells the truth about both the atrocities that my people go through but also the inspirations we draw from.

— Rayyan Abu Arra, An-Najah National University, Shireen Abu Aqleh Memorial Scholarship recipient 2022
The Israeli occupation and Apartheid policies create almost endless obstacles and threats to students pursuing higher education. Military roadblocks, the Apartheid Wall, along with intimidation, assault and arbitrary arrest by Israeli soldiers prevent thousands of students and teachers from reaching their universities every day. Many Palestinian universities have been closed down, raided, and severely damaged by the Israeli military over the years. Palestinian students in Gaza are prevented from leaving the country to attend universities in other parts of the world. The economic deterioration makes it impossible for many families to afford university tuition or even transportation.

In the face of all these daunting circumstances, Palestinian young people are utterly determined to earn degrees to create a better future for themselves, their families, and their country.

I chose a major that is male-dominated, and I aspire to excel in it. The world we live in has already put up too many obstacles, and having this scholarship gave me room to breathe, and the confidence knowing that complete strangers have faith in me to push forward.

— Amira Yousef, Computer Engineering major, Palestine Polytechnic University, Hebron, West Bank

Amira lives in Doha City near Bethlehem, but her family members are refugees originally from the village of Sufla near Jerusalem that was ethnically cleansed in 1948. Her father passed away when she was in grade school and her mother and older sister support the family.
Recruitment and Selection

Students apply directly through MECA’s website, are nominated by community organizations or financial aid offices at universities. Last year we received more than 700 applications.

Our selection committees serve in two locations, Gaza and the West Bank and are made up of:

• MECA staff
• Palestinian community leaders and members of grassroots organizations
• Palestinian educators

Selection criteria includes:

• Financial need
• Prior academic achievement
• Commitment to giving back to the community

Priority goes to:

• Continuing students
• Women
• Students with chronic diseases or disabilities
• Refugees
• Residents in high-risk areas.

I aspire to enroll in a master’s degree and then work as a pharmacist, maybe eventually opening my own pharmacy. I’m also interested in learning drug manufacturing and monitoring processes of medications. I look to the future with confidence in the direction of my dreams. I will work to complete my studies with excellent high grades.

— Shatha Abu Obaida, Pharmacy Major, Al-Azhar University, Gaza City, Gaza Strip

Shatha lives in a refugee camp in the city of Khan Younis, Gaza. Growing up, she endured the death of her mother and a terrible gas accident in her home.

Each year, the number of scholarship applications increases, and MECA can only award scholarships for one out of five students who apply. Priority is given to those students who have the highest financial need and the greatest potential to make contributions to their communities and their country once they graduate. Women and refugees are also given priority because they have limited access to other sources of funding.
The remarkable students selected to receive scholarships from MECA this year are studying in a range of fields. The most popular majors are medicine, nursing, business, and computer engineering/IT. Sixty-eight percent of the students are women, 101 are studying in the Gaza Strip, and 49 are at West Bank universities.

I dreamed of studying nursing because I wanted to help people who are looking for a caring hand to comfort them and ease their pain.

— Thabet Irziqat, Nursing student, Hebron University

Thabet’s family has no stable source of income after his father passed away. He is a cancer survivor himself, who has volunteered at organizations that provide care for cancer patients and survivors. As a nurse, Thabet hopes to specialize in palliative care.
In addition, the following generous MECA supporters have pledged or donated to fund one or more individual four-year scholarships and hundreds of others have made contributions to support the scholarship program generally:

Frank and Blythe Baldwin  
Khalil and Ann Barhoum  
Henry and Kathleen Chalfant  
Deborah Condon  
Patricia Daugherty and Margaret Coulter  
Lynn Coville  
Mary Hope Dean  
Deborah Smith Douglas  
Majed and Najwa Faruki  
Hassan and Margaret Fouda  
Abdel Ghunaim

Joseph Hajjar  
Sarah Humphrey  
Brigitte and Karl Jaensch  
David Keenan and Alice Mosley  
Sarah Ludden and Nancy Lanoue  
Rosemary McKinnon  
Nidal and Saandra Nazzal  
Jennifer Olmsted  
Dean Pasvankias and Peggy Allegra Chiang  
Moustafa Nachabe and Hana Safah  
Laila Saleh Baker  
Marc Sapir  
Karen Saunders  
Monique Weil  
Bonnie Weiss  
Linda Whitley

The Middle East Children’s Alliance scholarship was my only hope to complete my studies and I chose business administration and digital marketing since it represents the best option in order to get a good job after graduation. As part of my belief in social work, I volunteered at Baytuna Charity Association and to enhance my experience, I made a report on the marketing plan of a restaurant in Gaza.

—Muhammad Ashraf Abu Dayer, Al-Quds Open University, Gaza Strip, Jabalia Camp.
I chose to study information technology because of its impact on our world and all aspects of life. I aspire to complete a master’s degree and teach at my university.

— Malak Ghassan Faris Salha, Contemporary Business and Management Information Systems major, Al-Aqsa University in Gaza.