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Dr. Ahmed Abukhater: Author, Business Executive, and Record-setting Athlete

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An environmentalist and athlete, Palestinian American Dr. Ahmed Abukhater grew up with a desire to fix the inequalities in Gaza, one of the most dangerous being the water supply.

Dr. Abukhater's book, "Water as a Catalyst for Peace - Transboundary Water Management and Conflict Resolution" was published in August of 2013. It examines international water allocation policies in many parts of the world and suggests that resolving disputes over water can introduce understanding and cooperation over larger political issues and help settle formidable international conflicts.

"As is the case in many war-torn areas, for people in Gaza acquiring water is a daily struggle - it is almost an insurmountable task to cope with the intermittent water supply," says Abukhater. "If we resolve the water issue in a way that guarantees equitable allocation of natural resources, not only would we be able to build trust between two nations, but we would set the stage for other issues like land sovereignty and borders to be amicably resolved. Only then can peace be in sight."

Despite the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Israel maintains control of much of Gaza's water supply, 90 percent of which is undrinkable because of nitrates from uncontrolled sewage and fertilizers from irrigation of farmlands. Water comes from the shallow coastal aquifer shared with Israel and Egypt, which is replenished each year by rainfall.

"Access to adequate water supply is equally crucial for both human survival and economic development. The fact that Palestinian communities desperately lack that access triggered a desire to explore new ways to secure an ample and sustainable water supply for human consumption, rejuvenate depleted natural resources and stabilize the region," explains Abukhater. "That was my first motive: to give more water to Palestinians. But the more I got into it, the more I unraveled the unique nuances surrounding water resource issues as they relate to politics. It's not just a question of supply."

Born in Rafah, Abukhater grew up pondering the world beyond the surrounding borders and barbed wires of Gaza. An aspiring scholar, his dreams started to take shape when he received the Clinton scholarship and moved to the U.S. where he pursued his Master's degree in City Planning. Motivated and inspired by his own upbringing during the first Palestinian Intifada in a region thirsty for water and peace, he went on to finish his Ph.D. on the same topic. He contends, "This triggered a profound aspiration to become a planner and educator. This desire grew stronger as I

continued to learn about the world and myself and my role in bringing about a more peaceful future for the region.”

Abukhater is currently the Global Director of Product Management for Pitney Bowes based in New York where he lives with his wife and three children. Prior to this position, he worked in California as Esri's Global Industry Manager for Planning and Community Development and Director of PLACES (Planning, Architecture, Construction, Engineering and Sustainability).

Throughout his career, Abukhater has authored many publications and received over 20 prestigious awards for his work.

Abukhater holds a Ph.D. in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Texas at Austin, with a focus on transboundary water resources management, conflict resolution and hydro-diplomacy. He has a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Gaza.

Abukhater's expertise is not only in the field of water resources management. In 2006, he broke new ground as the first powerlifter to represent Palestine at the World Association of Benchers and Deadlifters World Championships (WABDL), setting the first international record for Palestine.

"I was truly elated when I saw the Palestinian flag displayed proudly among other nations," he said.

Abukhater represented Palestine again in the WABDL World Championships in November 2007, where he won his division and set a new Palestinian record, lifting 452 pounds and 502 pounds at a later competition in 2009. He also set a new record for the state of Illinois in 2004. Since then he has held several international records in the open and elite men's division (198-pound weight class): 630 pounds in squat, 610 pounds in bench press, and 705 pounds in deadlift.

His father, a high school English teacher in Gaza, introduced him to powerlifting when he was a teen as a way to stay in shape. "In Palestine, sports are a refuge from the harsh reality and daily struggle. The limited resources should never be a reason not to dream, excel, and compete," he adds.

Despite his many accomplishments, Abukhater says he is most proud of his family roots. "I am truly humbled by the wisdom and strength that my family exemplifies despite the many obstacles they face. Being able to represent such a great nation at world events, whether it be keynoting or competing, means everything to me," he says.

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info@imeu.org | (714) 251-6016 | 2913 El Camino Real #436 Tustin, CA 92782

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