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Laurier partners with Daughters for Life Foundation

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University will sign a memorandum of understanding with the Daughters for Life Foundation, enabling the university to sponsor two women from the Middle East to study toward undergraduate degrees. Daughters for Life Foundation President Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish and Laurier President and Vice-Chancellor Max Blouw will sign the agreement at an event January 13 at 3 p.m. in the Paul Martin Centre on Laurier’s Waterloo campus.

Abuelaish established the Daughters for Life Foundation in memory of three of his daughters, Bessan, 21; Mayar, 15; and Aya, 13 who were killed by an Israeli tank shell during an attack in the Gaza strip in 2009. The Foundation, which honours his daughters’ love of learning, is built on the belief that educating young women will build the road to peace in the Middle East. The Daughters for Life Foundation offers awards and scholarships to young women of any Middle Eastern nationality, background or religion to study in Canada, the US and the United Kingdom.

“Establishing a just, safe, healthy and peaceful world is only possible if we ensure that women are educated and able to fully participate in and contribute to their communities and the world,” said Abuelaish. “The Daughters for Life Foundation is proud to be playing an important role in supporting the education of women in the Middle East and we are honored to have Wilfrid Laurier join us in our transformative mission to foster peace through education.”

Laurier’s partnership with The Daughters for Life Foundation is the first initiative under Laurier’s new Global Leadership Investment Initiative (GLII). This year a student club, Daughters for Life Laurier, was established to raise awareness concerning the realities facing those living in the midst of unresolved violent conflict and to sponsor international students to study at Laurier.

“This student initiative is a profound reflection of Laurier’s spirit,” said Blouw. “Through our partnership with the Daughters for Life Foundation, our students will empower young women to return to their home countries as inspired leaders; and we will all be enriched throughout the process.”

Gavin Brockett, an associate professor and co-coordinator of Laurier’s Muslim Studies option, said students were inspired by a presentation from Abuelaish in his first-year arts seminar two years ago and that GLII is the result of a class project.

“As students become more aware of global dynamics and the global suffering that can be so difficult for us to comprehend, they want to learn more about the people who are directly affected, and they seek meaningful ways to respond,” said Brockett. “This initiative is overcoming this challenge by encouraging students to explore these realities in an apolitical way.”

The student co-presidents of Daughters for Life Laurier are grateful for the opportunity to bring the partnership to Laurier.

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"I love to see young women given the opportunity to learn and to change their lives as well as those around them," said Annie Serez, a third-year Global Studies student and co-president of Daughters for Life Laurier. "Laurier's collaboration with the Daughters for Life Foundation has already, and will continue to create wonderful opportunities for global and local relationships between students."

The University has committed substantial funds to support GLII through the Laurier International Friendship Scholarship, and in February, Daughters for Life Laurier will ask graduate and undergraduate students to support a student levy to provide matching funds. If this is approved, GLII will provide for as many as ten international students to study on scholarship at Laurier.

"Daughters for Life Laurier exists to sustain our relationship with the Foundation and to maximize the number of students who can benefit from this program," said Elliot Alder, a third-year History student and co-president of Daughters for Life Laurier. "We hope that through this we can make a positive change in people's lives while also engaging with and enhancing the understanding of students at home."

Abuelaish was born, raised and educated in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. He received a scholarship to attend medical school at the University of Cairo, specialized in Obstetrics and Gynecology, and earned his Master's degree in Public Health, Health Policy and Management at Harvard University. He has received numerous humanitarian awards and honorary degrees for his work promoting peace in the world and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. He authored a memoir, *I Shall Not Hate: a Gaza Doctor's Journey* in 2010, which became an instant best seller and has been translated into 23 languages. Recently it was performed as a play in Germany, Italy and Israel. Abuelaish is currently an associate professor at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.

For more information, visit www.daughtersforlife.com

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Gavin Brockett, Associate Professor & Co Co-ordinator,
Muslim Studies Option Middle East/Islamic History
519-884-0710 ext. 3774 or gbrockett@wlu.ca

Kevin Crowley, Director
Communications & Public Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca