

Fahmia's experience with MBI Al Jaber Foundation

About me...

My name is Fahmia Taha Al-Fotih. I was born in a small village in Taiz, Yemen. My experience in high school was exceptional, as I used to be the only girl in the school (because at that time people did not let their daughters go to high school. The maximum education a lucky girl could obtain was to study up to 6th grade). I thank God that I have a very supportive family.

My first degree was in English Studies and Literature from the University of Sana'a and I have a diploma in Media and Communication Studies. I am now doing my MA in International Relations at the University of Westminster. Earlier, I developed a career in Journalism while I was a university student and worked as a freelance journalist and columnist for more than 5 years. I was the only female journalist at the Yemen Times English newspaper at that time. My contributions were mainly on women's issues and women's rights, so most people liked to brand me as a 'feminist' (I think I am not! The fact is that I am interested in development and women are unquestionably a crucial element in development).

Besides journalism, I was working as a part-time lecturer at different institutions and I enjoyed inspiring young people. Journalism and teaching were such an inspiration to me. Then, there was a turning point in my career when I worked with the United Nations. It was a tremendous experience in all aspects. I was selected by the Young Arab Leaders organization to represent Yemen in a leadership module that took place in Germany and was supposed to finish by December, in Dubai. Before being awarded the MBI Al Jaber scholarship, I was working as a consultant with a USAID project that focused on youth in Yemen. We were a great team and we did great work.

I have two dreams: I really want to be President of my country or Prime Minister. If things do not work in Yemen, I really would like to be the General Secretary of the United Nations. People usually laugh at me when I say that but it really is my dream and I won't give it up. I

have been appointed Westminster Ambassador for the academic year 2008/2009 and I really feel that I was going to be a real ambassador.

The beginning...

Oh God...during the three years prior to my enrolment at the University of Westminster, I kept trying to apply for MBI Al Jaber scholarships but I always missed the deadlines. I used to regularly check their website. At the beginning of 2008, I was so determined and I kept my eyes fixed on their website. Then I applied the first time I saw their announcement, submitted my application 2 months prior to the deadline and forwarded the announcement to my friends. I was anxiously waiting for the results, praying day and night. Months passed and I thought I had not been selected. I kept looking at the MBI application paper saying 'unsuccessful applicants will not be informed'. I knew that such prestigious scholarships would be very competitive and I started to lose hope!

30th July, 2008

One day, after finishing my French class, I saw some missed calls from abroad and wondered who might have called me. I thought it was a mistake. Then, while I was travelling home on public transport (exhausted), in spite of the noise, I heard my mobile ringing. Answering the mobile, I heard a nice lady on the other side wanting to speak to Fahmia Al-Fotih. Then she told me that she was from the MBI Al Jaber Foundation (when I heard MBI, I screamed 'Finally guys!!' – paying no attention to the people around me). Then the interview took place a week later, just half an hour before my French final exam. I was at the institute looking for a quiet place in order to hear the MBI interview panel on the mobile. But I was in an awkward position, as the noise of the students was filling the place. However, this lovely lady (Marylyn) was really encouraging me, she was speaking clearly and repeated the questions. Aaahh... I was really worried, but Marylyn, I remember, comforted me (saying I had done well). She told me the results would arrive a week later... Oh no, not another tortuous week, I told myself. It was such a long time for me to wait. I prayed and counted the days.

6th August, 2008

It was Wednesday and the first thing I did when I woke up was to open my email and see my inbox to find nothing! They told me they would let me know the results of the selection the following week! (Of course it was my fault, as I had forgotten the time change between Yemen and London).

On the afternoon of the same day, my friend Abdulrahman, who applied for an MBI Al Jaber scholarship as well, called me saying happily that he had been awarded a scholarship. The first thought that came to my mind was that they had sent him a reply and had forgotten about me! Oh God, I did not do well in the interview... I looked for the nearest Internet café to check my email and ease my mind. It was an hour of torture. Finally, I quickly opened my email, closed my eyes with my hand on my heart and slowly clicked on the MBI email. I opened one eye and read the first line and then re-read it with two wide-open eyes: 'Following your acceptance by Westminster University, and your application to our Foundation and recent interview, I am pleased to inform you that you have been awarded an MBI Al Jaber Foundation scholarship to study for a Master's degree in International Relations'. My God, I had gotten it! I was an MBI scholar. I ran like crazy to my family and kissed each one passionately (imagine more than thirteen people) but I was over the moon!

I know it seems crazy but I kept reading the email along with the contract many times and I could not sleep. I finally had a chance to do my MA in the field of International Relations and – most importantly – in London. I felt that my dreams had started to come true. Honestly, I won't forget that day, never ever!