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News

'Message of hope from Gaza': Teenage sisters win award for turning war debris into bricks

Tala and Fara Mousa take Middle East title in Earth Prize



Gazan sisters win Middle East award for method of turning rubble into bricks

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Daniel Bardsley

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Two sisters from [Gaza](#) are the Middle East winners of a major environmental award for their method of turning rubble into bricks – and are in the running for the global title.

Tala Mousa, 17, and her sister Farah, 15, hope their approach could play a role in rebuilding Gaza from the debris of more than [two years of war](#).

Judges chose the girls as the Middle East champions in The Earth Prize and it is now up to a public vote to decide whether they will be the overall winners.



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The sisters and their family lost their home after an Israeli strike last August and have been forced to move five times since, Tala said. They are currently living in a tent.

Tala said she and her sister are “incredibly proud and grateful” to be the regional winners, an accolade that comes with \$12,500 to help them develop and scale-up their method.

“Being selected as Middle East winners isn’t just an achievement for us, but a message of hope from Gaza to the world that even in the hardest circumstance we are still capable of innovation and creating solutions,” she told *The National*.

“We are very optimistic about the wider adoption of our method because it’s simple, low-cost and adaptable, especially in conflict and disaster zones.”

Salvaging solutions

The method involves collecting and crushing rubble before mixing it with whatever binder is available, which may include straw, ash, clay or glass powder. Most rubble can be used, the sisters said, as long as it is not contaminated with harmful substances.

The resulting blocks or bricks are not suitable for bearing loads but can be used for partitions, pavements or garden beds.

The method was developed beside the family’s tent in an area also used for doing laundry and cooking. Their grandfather, Samer, helped with some of the practical work.

The girls also live with their father, a university dean also called Samer, their mother, Samar, an industrial engineer, and their brother, Yahya, 13.



Winning the Middle East award will enable the sisters to carry out workshops to encourage others to use their method. They hope those they train will teach others the technique, multiplying its impact.

Farah said their family were living in “difficult conditions” and she thought their idea stood out to the judges “because it comes from real, lived experience” and is practical and scalable.

Empowering communities

“It doesn’t just address an environmental issue but also empowers communities and supports sustainable rebuilding,” she added.

“In the coming month we plan to start implementing the project on the ground through workshops and block production.

“Over the next year we hope the knowledge will spread among new communities, with more workshops, more blocks being produced, and wider adoption of the idea. We have a big passion for this.”

Tala and Farah are unable to attend school, but they are continuing their studies using online resources and schoolbooks they have bought, amid difficult conditions.

“It’s really hard,” Tala said. “There are no schools in person ever. There’s the online school with our ministry in the West Bank. We study with them, but we can’t upload the

sessions. We just study the curriculum by ourselves and get the exams from them."

The sisters' Earth Prize entry, called Build Hope, was shortlisted for the Middle East section alongside two entries from Turkey and two from Lebanon. The contest is open to teams of young people aged 13 to 19.

The winners of each region – the Middle East, North America, Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Oceania and South-East Asia, and Europe – are being announced on successive days up to May 17. Like Tala and Mousa, each winning team is awarded \$12,500 to turn their idea into reality.

Once all the regional winners are announced, a public vote will decide on the overall champion, whose identity will be revealed on May 29.

The Earth Prize, run by Geneva-based non-profit organisation The Earth Foundation, is in its fifth year. The organisers say it has reached more than 21,000 students in 169 countries and territories and offers young people the opportunity to turn their concern about issues such as climate change into action.

Peter McGarry, the foundation's founder, said the 2026 winners represent "seven outstanding teams" tackling environmental challenges "with distinct and impactful solutions".

"Once again, these young innovators demonstrate that age is no barrier to meaningful change," he said in a statement. "Their work reflects a powerful combination of creativity, determination and a deep understanding of the communities they serve."

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