

Mrs. May Faysal El Khalil

Founder and President of the Beirut Marathon Association, May El Khalil was born and raised in the mountains of Lebanon in the small town of Alley.

She moved to Nigeria upon her marriage to Mr. Faysal El Khalil where she became part of an international community, and where she established the Lebanese Ladies in Nigeria, a non-governmental organization dedicated to providing assistance to the underprivileged members of Nigerian society and to promoting educational development by way of grants and scholarships.

Mrs. El Khalil moved back to Lebanon to find that the country she loved and longed for had changed and had become divided into religious cantons; blockades and militia checkpoints littered the once open roads. Neighbors of different religions who had lived side by side for generations, turned against each other, and massacres based on religious or political affiliation had become common.

She held to her core belief that despite all differences, people should focus on what they had in common, and this can unite them. Upon her permanent return to Lebanon she strove to bring people together through her passion for running, and the idea of creating an international running event for Lebanon was born.

After recovering from a nearly fatal accident while training to run a Marathon, Mrs. El Khalil brought her dream to life by creating the Beirut Marathon Association in 2012. From her hospital bed she oversaw the emergence of the Association she had aspired to create. Armed with determination, unwavering resolve, and the help of her family, friends, and a dedicated team of supporters from Lebanon and abroad, Mrs. El Khalil succeeded in establishing one of the most successful running events in the region, the Beirut Marathon. On the morning of October 19th 2003, Lebanon witnessed a unique event in its history and hosted its first international Marathon.

The event took on National proportions, and has grown exponentially ever since. The power of the Beirut Marathon to unite the nation became apparent in 2005 when Prime Minister Rafic Harriri was assassinated. Downtown Beirut, which was usually teeming with life, came to a standstill. Shops, cafes, and restaurants shut down and people who had invested in the newly rebuilt area were slowly losing their livelihood. The Beirut Marathon Association under the leadership of Mrs. El Khalil organized a race dedicated to unity and peace in the country and over 60,000 Lebanese participated clad in white as a symbol of peace. Ever since then, all of the Association's races have taken place in the face of conflict and national disagreement to bring people together to concentrate on their similarities.

May El Khalil is the driving force behind the Beirut Marathon Association's continued success. She also rose up to the challenge of becoming acting General Manager of the Association for two years.

She has been recognized for her work nationally and internationally; Mrs. El Khalil has received the AIPS Power of Sport Award in Lausanne, and the Laureus World

Sports Academy Lifetime achievement award in Abu Dhabi. She has been decorated by Lebanese President Michel Suleiman with the National Order of the Cedar, and has been granted appreciation awards from the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, The Brazil-Lebanon Chamber of Commerce, and the Lebanese Ministry of Youth and Sport. Mrs. El Khalil was also a Paul Harris Fellow of the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International for 2010 and 2011. In 2013 she was presented with an honorary Ph.D. from LAU (the Lebanese American University).

Mrs. El Khalil spoke at the TED global conference in Edinburgh Scotland in 2013. There she shared the Beirut Marathon Association's story with an international audience, and she explained that she founded the largest running event in the Middle East as an instrument of peace through sports. The assertion she made in her talk was that "peacemaking was not a sprint, but a marathon", meaning that this kind of endeavor was a long race that requires commitment, endurance, and optimal belief in the ultimate goal. For May this optimum goal is peace and prosperity for her country, as she still runs her figurative Marathon towards that goal. To date Mrs. El Khalil's TED talk has been viewed almost four million times on the official TED Youtube channel.

In addition to her work at the Beirut Marathon Association, Mrs. El Khalil is a mother of four children and grandmother to three grandchildren. She speaks at different Universities and organizations about the power of sport, perseverance, unity, and making the impossible dream of peace happen through running.