

Interview Maha

What was your first thought when you found out that you had received a scholarship?

My first feeling was a mixture of gratitude, relief, and hope. Coming from Gaza and having worked for years as a pharmacist and healthcare provider in a conflict-affected setting, receiving the StAR Scholarship meant much more to me than financial support. It was the opportunity to continue my education despite circumstances that could easily have interrupted my academic and professional journey. I felt that someone believed in my potential and was giving me the chance to transform difficult experiences into something meaningful for the future.

What does the StAR Scholarship enable you to do in your daily life?

The StAR Scholarship gives me something that had become very difficult to experience during the war: stability.

Living for a long time in an unsafe environment, with constant uncertainty and fear for my life made it extremely difficult to plan for the future. The scholarship enables me to live in a safer environment and focus on my Master of Science in Global Health at the University of Geneva.

It allows me to dedicate my time to studying, research, and developing the knowledge and skills that I hope to bring back to my community. It also gives me the opportunity to participate in academic life, meet people from different countries, exchange ideas, and learn in an international environment.

Most importantly, it has given me the space to think beyond immediate survival and to start thinking again about what I can contribute to the future.

What have you learned about yourself since you've been in Switzerland?

I have learned that I am more adaptable and resilient than I previously realized. Moving to a new country, studying in a multicultural environment, and rebuilding parts of my life far from home have challenged me in many ways. At the same time, these experiences have taught me to be more independent, open to different perspectives, and confident in expressing my own experiences and ideas. I have also realized how strongly I want to use my professional and academic background to contribute to communities affected by conflict.

What would you like to achieve through your studies in the long term?

My long-term goal is to contribute to strengthening Global Health education, research, and practice in Palestine and other conflict-affected settings. After completing my studies, I hope to return to Gaza as a researcher and lecturer and contribute to developing curricula in areas such as humanitarian health, health policy analysis, and drug policy.

I also hope to work with local NGOs and the Palestinian Ministry of Health, providing research, consultation, and training related to health challenges in conflict settings. Ultimately, my ambition is to establish a regional Global Health innovation centre that develops practical, context-specific solutions for communities affected by conflict and brings the lessons learned in Palestine into the wider Global Health community.

What would be your wish(es) for future StAR students?

My greatest wish is that future StAR students receive not only financial support, but also the feeling that they belong, that their experiences matter, and that their ambitions are still possible despite the circumstances they have faced.

I would encourage them to make full use of the opportunities available to them, to share their perspectives, and to build connections with people from different backgrounds. I also hope that, one day, they will be able

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to use the opportunities they received to create opportunities for others. A scholarship can change the path of one student, but through that student, its impact can reach an entire community.