



THE INQUIRER AWARDS 2005

Journalists from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine competed for the prestigious title of investigative reporter of the year 2005 in two categories: Print media and for the first time in the region - investigative reports for television. The Inquirer Award project aims to raise the professional standard of investigative journalism and to recognise the work of excellent journalists in the region. It is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and managed by British Embassies in the region, in co-ordination with The Thomson Foundation - a non-governmental organisation based in Cardiff that specialises in training for the media.

Judges were looking for entries that showed comprehensive and thorough research, incisive interviewing techniques, and creative and well-constructed writing and presentation. The name of the reporter was

hidden and the entry was given a number. The judges scored each entry according to 6 criteria. The 15 articles and reports that scored the highest marks moved up to the final round and an independent judge from outside the region evaluated and scored each entry. The total score determined the winners.

As part of the project, The Thomson Foundation ran a series of training workshops on the skills of investigative reporting for the print and broadcast media in all the participating countries. A total of 160 print and broadcast journalists benefited from this practical training.

As well as receiving The Inquirer Award 2005, the first place winner for the best investigative report for Print and the first place winner for the best investigative report for Television enjoyed an all-

expense paid study tour for one week in the UK.

In the Investigative Reporting workshops, there was a large turnout of trainees in Damascus and a high degree of dedication and enthusiasm to match. By the same token, Syrian finalists in the Inquirer Awards competition outnumbered any others in the region. They eventually walked off with two trophies (first place winner in the TV category, Ms. Raeda Waqqaf from Syrian TV, and 3rd place in print press category, Mr. Hammoud al Mahmmoud from the national newspaper Teshreen).

On announcement of the results, Raeda and Hammoud became the toast of Damascus. Their Inquirer Award exploits were celebrated in local TV, radio and newspaper reports. Raeda was also interviewed on British Satellite News. We had our own Q&A session with them:



Raeda Waqqaf

Looking back at her 1st place win against what she thought were long odds, Raeda said she isn't contemplating an encore this year. Yet her success has captured the imagination of many of her colleagues in the Syrian media, she told us, and that is bound to galvanise a lot more Syrian entries this year to try and match her feat. Raeda may well be living up to her name, which is Arabic for pioneer. She could be blazing a trail for others to follow.



Hammoud Mahmoud

Hammoud hails from the remote northern Syrian city of Raqqa and cut his journalistic teeth on the Inquirer Awards 2005 with the two entries he submitted both making the shortlist and one claiming 3rd place trophy in the print media category. Hammoud says he will be gunning for first place in the 2006 competition fortified with the armoury of professional skills and expert knowledge he acquired from the Investigative Reporting workshops.

We wish him and all future entrants good luck!