



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Kalima?

Kalima - "word" in Arabic - is an ambitious non-profit initiative funded by a grant from the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, which funds the translation, publication, and distribution of high-quality works of classic and contemporary writing from other languages into Arabic.

Why was Kalima created?

Kalima was created to increase the number and choice of books available to readers in Arabic.

Throughout Europe's "Dark Ages" and until the end of the first millennium, Arab scholars and libraries led the world in translating, producing and preserving knowledge in science, medicine, philosophy and the arts. During that time, knowledge flourished thanks to the many translations of important works into Arabic. Since then, however, few foreign works have found their way into Arabic, while the rest of the world has enjoyed a wealth of both domestic and translated writing – producing a gap that Kalima aims to close. There is much debate about the scale of the problem. However, according to the UNDP, Spain translates in one year about the same number of books that have been translated into Arabic over the last thousand years; and Greece, with a population of 11 million, translates five times more books each year than the Arab world which has a population of over 300 million.

Why is this important for the Arab-speaking world?

Because knowledge and books are important. Books give people access to knowledge, inspiring intellectual and economic development; they enrich people's lives by educating, inspiring or entertaining them. Currently in most Arabic countries, "great works" of world literature or academia are only available in the original language, limiting access to a select group of society.

Arabic is also a beautiful, expressive language, and one that should be celebrated and valued more by giving readers a greater choice of quality titles in translation. For all these reasons, we believe that Arabic readers deserve to be able to read and enjoy the broadest range of quality writing from around the world in their mother tongue.

Why have so few foreign books been translated into Arabic to date?

For many reasons. The problem has existed for over 1,000 years and many factors have played a part. Reasons include geo-political strife; a fragmented book industry which has suffered historically from a lack of quality translation and translators, piracy, and a lack of marketing, merchandising and modernised distribution channels. These issues are compounded by cultural, social, economic and even linguistic factors that have made the Arabic-speaking markets relatively less attractive than other regions for the international publishing industry.

What are Kalima's objectives?

We have four clear objectives. Firstly, to fund the translation and publication of books from other languages into Arabic. Secondly, to support marketing and distribution initiatives. Thirdly, to support and promote the Arabic book industry on the international stage, like International Book Fairs. And finally, to invest in translation as a profession, to encourage more and better quality translators.

How do you support translators?

One of our primary objectives is to support the development of quality translators in greater numbers. One of the initiatives we're working on is setting up translation scholarships. We support existing translators by ensuring that they



are well compensated for their work. Finally we are looking into systems for quality assessment and rating translators, to encourage and promote improved quality.

Who is involved in the project?

The Chief Executive of Kalima is Karim Nagy, an Abu Dhabi based businessman and passionate reader and collector of books. The idea and vision for Kalima came from Karim, and Jumaa Abdulla Al Qubaisi, the Director of the Abu Dhabi Book Fair and co-founder of Kalima.

How is Kalima funded?

Kalima is funded by a grant from the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage and it enjoys the direct endorsement of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Chairman of the Executive Council. We aim to become self-funding within two years.

Is Kalima a publisher?

No. We are a non-profit initiative working with publishers to broaden access to books from around the world for readers in Arabic. We are not competing with publishers – they are our partners.

What distribution channels does Kalima use?

We are working to establish new, reliable and extensive distribution systems and to improve what's already in place. Distribution is via two main channels: Kalima and publishers. Kalima distributes books for free and offer them to schools, libraries and cultural organisations. In addition, Kalima is working with publishers to distribute the paid for books using their existing channels. Kalima is also planning that some of the books will be available to buy online.

Who are your partner publishers?

We are working with a number of partner publishers including Arab Scientific, Librairie Orientale, Dar al Shorouk, Al-Masriah al Lubnania and Ein.

How many Arab speakers are there in the world?

Arabic ranks sixth in the world's league table of languages, with an estimated 250 million native speakers.

What is the demand for books in the Arab world?

There is lower readership for all genres of writing in the Arabic world. We believe that there is a vicious cycle governing supply-demand, which Kalima aims to tackle. With inconsistent product quality, poor distribution and piracy, it's no wonder that interest in books has suffered in the Arabic world. By producing well produced titles, we believe we can revive a thirst for reading.

How do you market the books in the Arabic world?

We are working very closely with our partner publishers to market the books and we are in the process of developing marketing and advertising plans in conjunction with them. In addition, our website, www.kalima.ae, recently went online and we have a solid PR strategy to create awareness for Kalima. We are also working closely with important book fairs around the world, such as those in Frankfurt and London.

Do you plan to translate books from Arabic into other languages?

That is certainly a long-term goal for Kalima. However, we are initially focusing on the gap left by centuries of limited translation from other languages into Arabic.

What titles are available in translation today?

As of today the following candidate titles are available in translation:



- Il Segno (The Sign), Umberto Eco
- The Halo Effect, Phil Rosenzweig
- The Future of Human Nature, Jürgen Habermas
- A Briefer History of Time, Stephen Hawking
- Kafka on the Shore, Haruki Murakami
- The Arab Roots of Capitalism, Gene Heck
- The Clash within Civilizations: Coming to Term with Internal Conflicts, Dieter Senghaas
- The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World, Allan Greenspan
- The Fundamentals of Language, Roman Jakobson, Moris Halle

The remainder of the candidate titles are at different stages of rights acquisition and translation so they will be published throughout the year, when they are completed.

How do you know that your candidate titles haven't been translated before?

The simple answer is that in some cases we can't be completely sure. Checking existing translations is a difficult, time consuming process, and some translations may exist that we have not yet found. In some cases, where a translation exists, but the quality is poor, we will fund a new, high quality translation. This is a candidate list, titles that we believe are currently unavailable and that as such should be translated and published. At the launch the list will be at varying stages of rights negotiation, translation, etc. Some titles might be replaced if we discover "lost" quality translations over the coming months.

We welcome any input from interested parties regarding existing translations, or indeed other suggestions for titles.

How do the 100 titles break down by category, genre and language?

Category

Around two thirds of the list is Contemporary, a quarter Modern, with the remainder Classic.

Genre

30 of the candidate titles are Literature; 28 are Natural and Exact Sciences; 14 are Philosophy and Psychology; 12 are classed as Law, Social Sciences and Education; nine are History, Geography and Biography; six are Arts, Games and Sports and one is classed as Generalities and Bibliography.

Language

More than half of the titles will be translated from English, 9% from German, 8% from French, and 7% are from Ancient Greek. The remainder are a mix of Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Latin, Middle English, Norwegian, Danish, Polish, Russian, Swedish, and Yiddish.

What has been your approach to selecting titles?

In this first year, Kalima and its partner publishers selected the first 100 candidate titles. We intend to set up a distinguished editorial panel of academics and experts who will be responsible for title selection in future years.

Whilst it was difficult to pick only 100 books from the many thousands of high quality works from all over the world, our approach was pragmatic – picking high quality titles which are recognised as excellent works by well-respected writers. We chose a mix of literature, academic texts and other writing such as business books. The title selection process was rigorous and consisted of five steps:

- Long listing
- Cross-checking the long-list against existing translations
- Defining filters (e.g. classic vs contemporary; genre balance)
- Applying filters
- Grouping and selecting titles



How much do the books cost?

Our books are priced competitively with market prices. As we are marketing Arabic books for the first time, there will be ongoing promotions and special offers. Moreover, in order to make our books available to as many people as possible, expert, specialist and academic books are distributed free of charge to schools, universities, public libraries and cultural institutions across the Arab world.