

The **Green  
Warrior**

by  
**Saira Thomas**

Illustrated by Eman Salem





<sup>The</sup> **Green**  
**Warrior**

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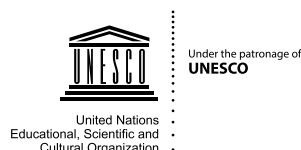
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'The Green Warrior' by Saira Thomas (Middle East), Illustrated by Eman Salem



Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative



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أصوات أجيال المستقبل لمنطقة الشرق الأوسط  
Voices of Future Generations for the Middle East Region



This book is printed on recycled paper, using sustainable and low-carbon printing methods.

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# dedication

Without the unwavering support of HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum and her network, this book would not have been published. Her generous contributions aided the editing and translation processes, allowing Saira Thomas to select a professional illustrator who best represents the essence of her story.

HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as Goodwill Ambassador for the Middle East, has ensured that important messages from children in the Arab world are communicated to their peers worldwide in all six UN languages.

We would also like to thank our regional partner, VoFG Arabia, as well as the Emirates Literature Foundation, who administer this wonderful initiative.



# foreword

The development of urban communities has brought untold comforts to countless people. Living conditions have been improved to no end, and life, for billions, is more convenient than ever before. But in our quest to build places in which people may thrive, we have far too often overlooked those with whom we share the planet: the plants and animals who were there long before we ever began to think of land as our own.

The unstoppable march of human development has, alongside its many benefits, led to countless problems: air polluted by vehicles and industries; the destruction of plant species; animals pushed out of their native habitats. Political inaction – and the lure of profit over the protection of our planet – continue to wreak havoc on our shared environment. As these problems have become ever harder to ignore, however, young activists all over the world have taken the lead in demanding solutions through advocacy and art, putting pressure on their governments and working with international organizations to tackle environmental damage and climate change head-on.

Saira Thomas' *The Green Warrior* follows in this noble tradition. Telling the story of a young girl's determination to restore part of the natural environment that her neighbourhood has uprooted, it is a heart-warming tale that reminds us of the possibilities that arise when young people put their minds to something.

Salma, the main character, is gifted with maturity beyond her years. She dreams of a lush green paradise taking root in the desert where she lives and making a pleasant home for animals and people alike. She becomes committed to seeing that wonderful vision come to life. This short story is filled with empathy and the delight that comes with achieving something great, something that transforms life for others. I am clearly not alone in finding Saira's work impressive: it has received the prestigious UNESCO Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative award – a high honour indeed.

*The Green Warrior* is a commendable achievement. Publishing at such a young age, let alone winning a prestigious writing prize, takes talent, perseverance, and the courage to share one's creative work. Saira should be very proud of herself, and I look forward to her future work.

— Dr Shashi Tharoor

*Author, Member of Parliament for Thiruvananthapuram, Lok Sabha (India)  
Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology  
Chairman, All-India Professionals' Congress  
Former Under-Secretary-General, United Nations*



# preface

Reading gives wings to our imagination as it helps to visualise dreams, experiences, adventures, challenges, celebrations and above all to empathise with a gamut of emotions that touch our hearts and make us think about transforming the world. As Descartes said: “I think, therefore I am.”

Life is full of challenges and disruptions, happy moments and exhilarations! In a world where negativity seems to have become the new normal and hope seems to be embroiled in the law of diminishing returns, there is only one thing you can control, and that is yourself, and your belief that you can be that is the need of the hour.

Saira has effortlessly woven many important elements in her narrative, including women’s empowerment, gender equality, sustainable practices, life lessons, all with a local flavour that resonates in the minds of all those who call UAE their home.

Congratulations to Saira! She validates the claim that you are never too young to voice an opinion, to stand for a cause, or to fight for what is right and to be that eternal flame in the darkness that is a harbinger of hope for the future generations as they consciously tackle world issues and seek sustainable solutions.

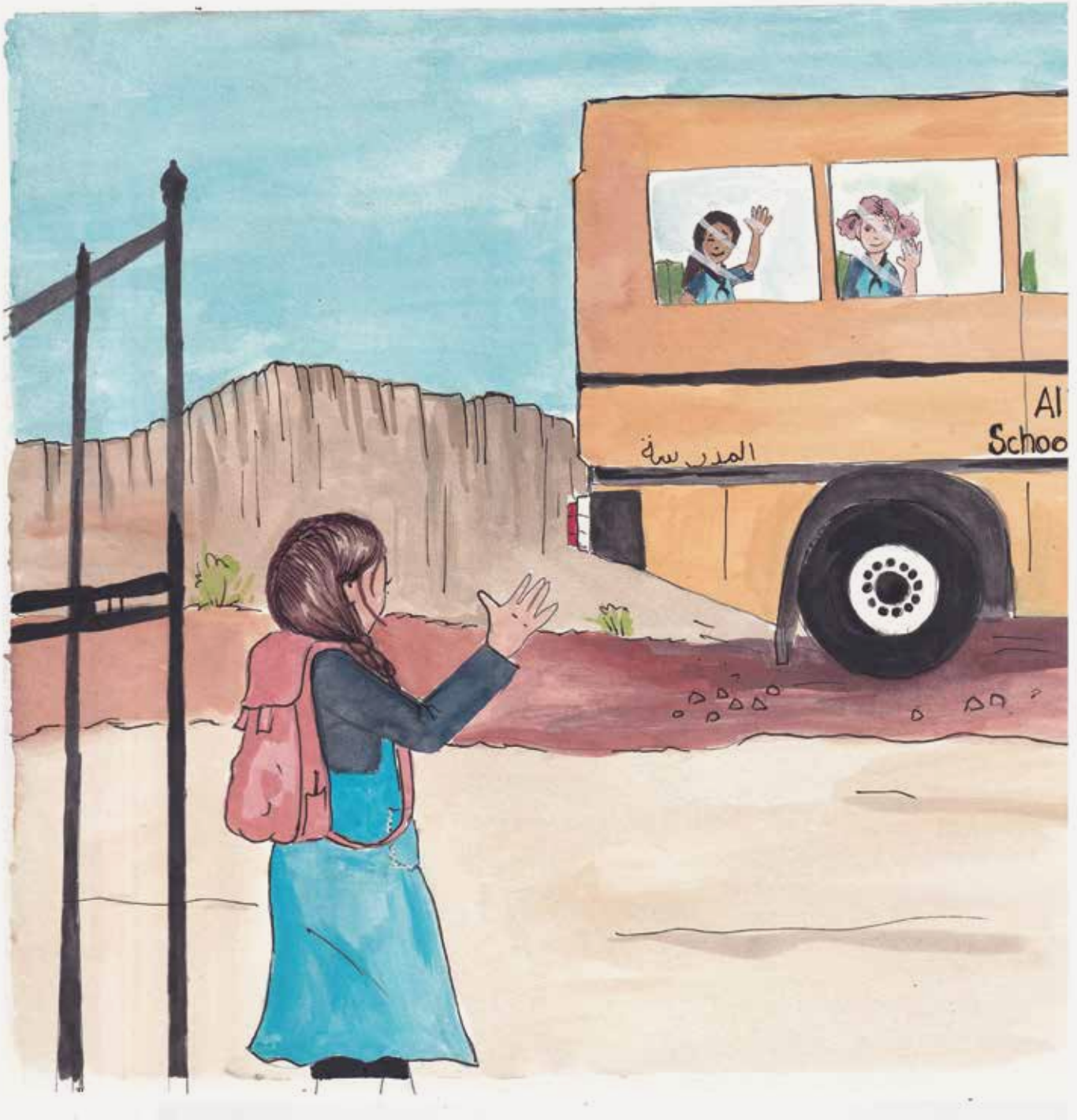
Reinvent and re-identify yourself as you explore the joys of reading and ponder over your dreams and thoughts and transform them into actions that contribute towards a better tomorrow. ‘From tiny acorns rise mighty oaks’ or should I say “Ghafs’ and one small step towards your dreams coupled with purposeful action can create a ‘green’ wave of awareness that promises an avenue of hope.

Wishing Saira many new milestones of success as she continues to influence many lives with her spark and determination to make a difference.

*Hemlata Thawani*  
*Vice-principal, Our Own English High School Sharjah, Girls*



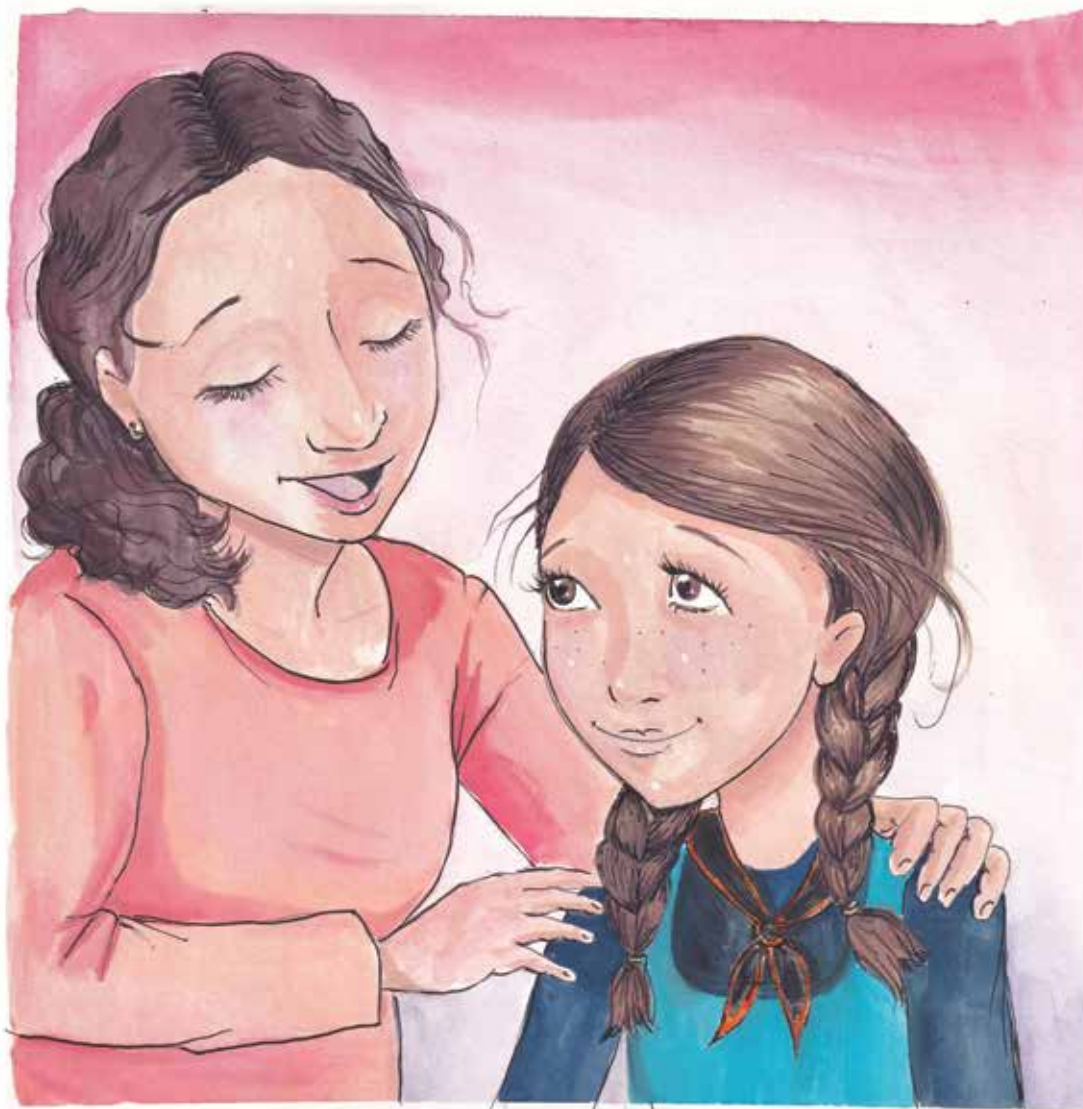






# Chapter 1

Salma raced out of her school bus and turned back once inside the gate to wave at her friends as the bus pulled off. She rushed to hug her mother, who was waiting for her at the door. “How was your day, dear?” asked her mother. “Great!” replied Salma, “We learnt about the Arabian oryx today. Did you know that many years ago, we could find them in our desert just like camels?”



“Wow! That sounds interesting. I am sure your grandmother will have many stories to tell about those times,” said her mother. “Since the weekend begins tomorrow, we will be visiting her as usual. But now, you should clean yourself up and have something to eat. Later, you can help me water the plants in the garden.” Salma ran to do as her mother asked.



Later in the evening, Salma was in the garden with her mother. They had finished watering the plants, and her mother was pruning the rose plants and keeping the cut-off stems in a neat pile in a corner.



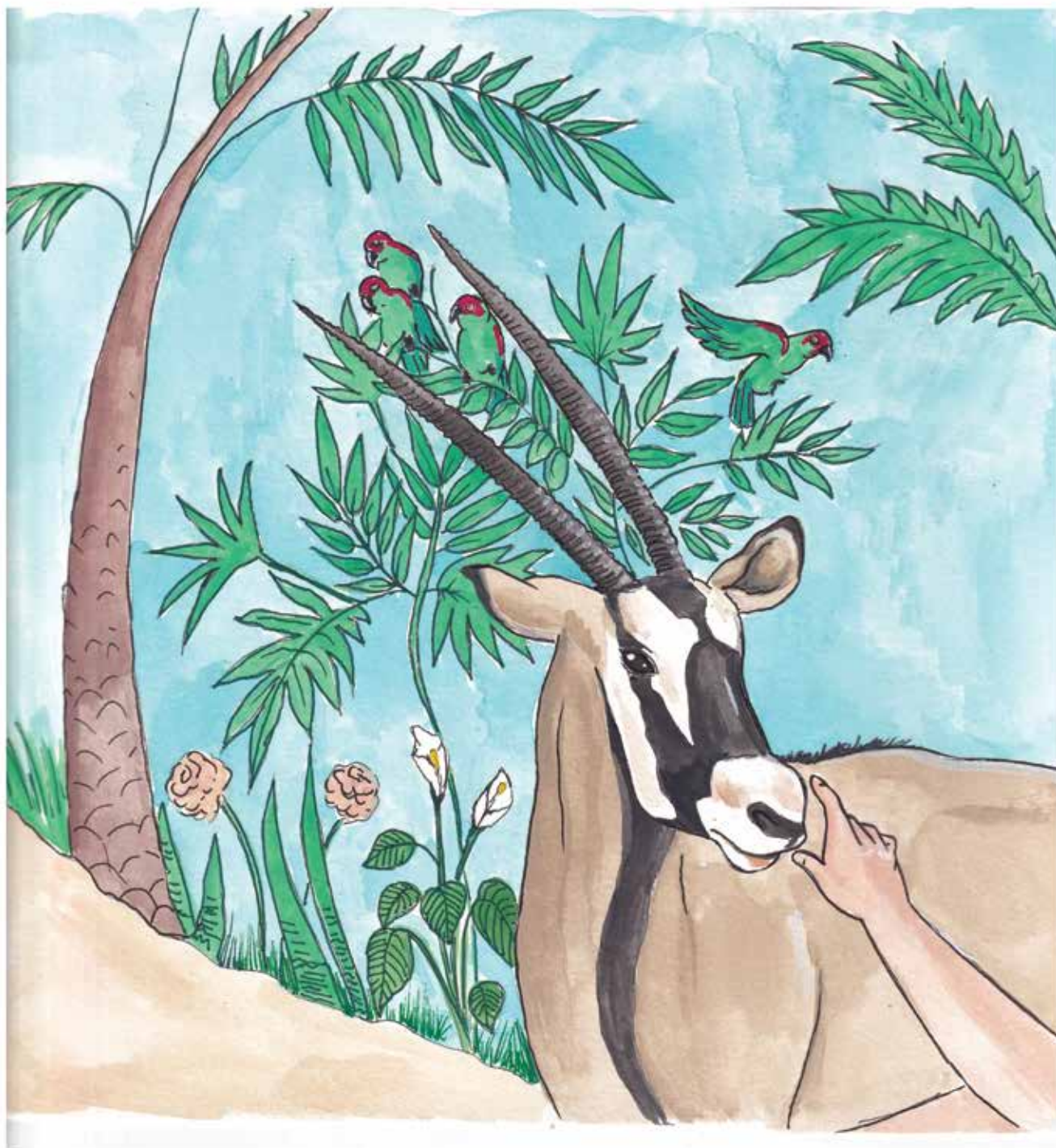


Salma loved being in the garden in the midst of flowers and greenery. The garden was not very big, but it was lush, even though they lived in the desert. Salma looked over the fence at the vast desert surrounding her home. She could see a ghaf tree in the distance. There were a few camels resting under the tree. She closed her eyes and tried to imagine a herd of Arabian oryxes running around.



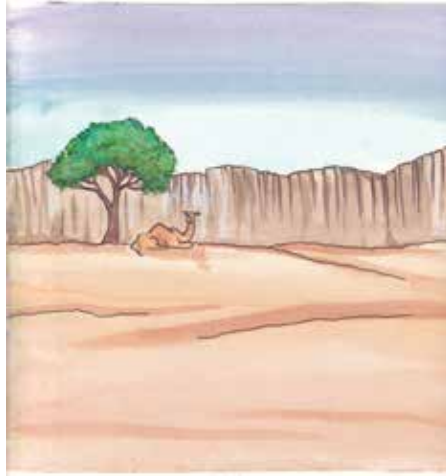
Soon her imagination took over and she saw green trees all around, colourful birds pecking on juicy fruits, and different types of animals playing hide and seek among the trees...she sighed – how peaceful and beautiful it is! In her daydream, she stared in wonder as a majestic Arabian oryx walked towards her. She extended her hand and it nuzzled her palm with its nose. It was very tickly, and she laughed out loud.





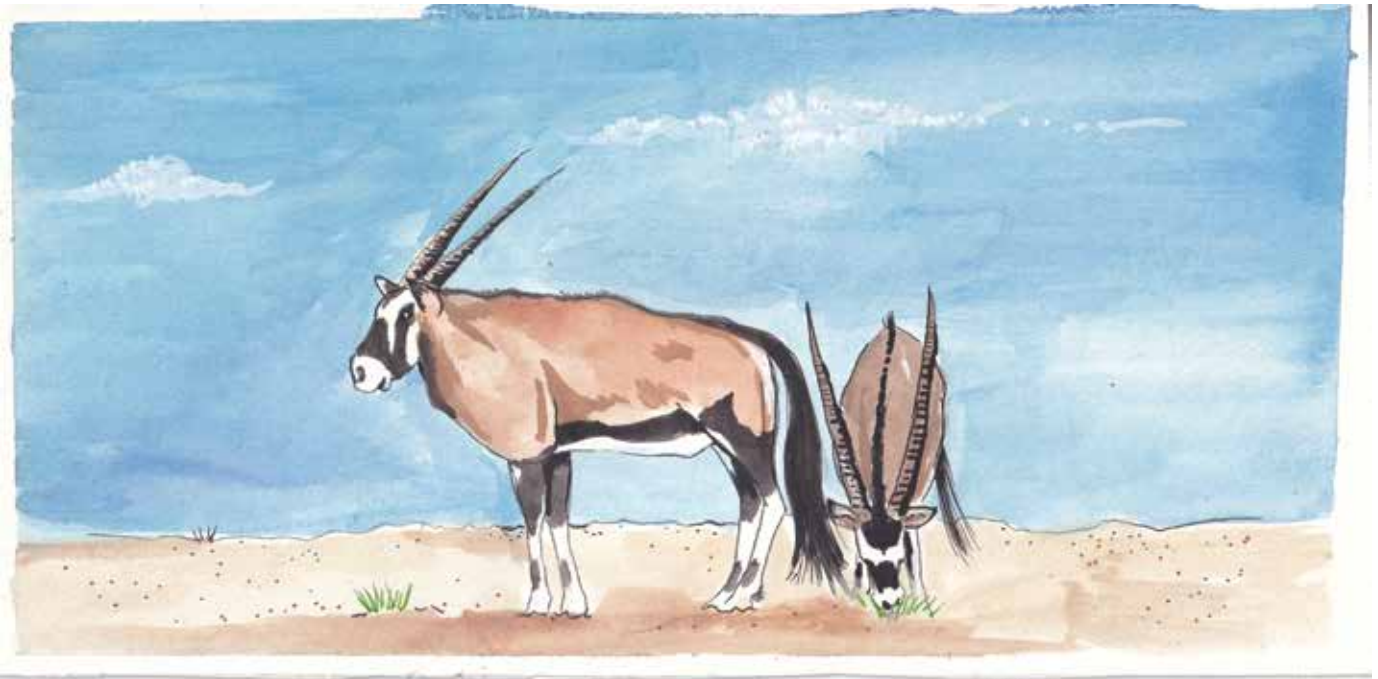
“Salma! It’s getting late, let’s go back inside, dear.” Salma was startled out of her dream by her mother’s voice. She opened her eyes and found that it was indeed dark outside.



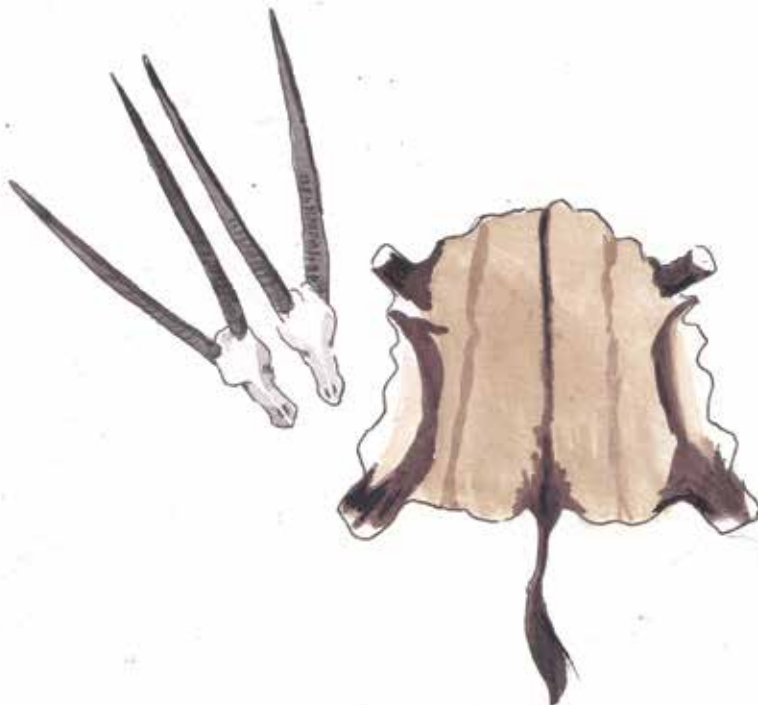


# Chapter 2

Grandmother's house was not very big, but it was beautiful and cool. Salma knew this was because the house was flanked by two huge acacia trees. It was under one of these trees that Salma found herself sitting and talking with her grandmother, after a delicious family lunch. She loved listening to her grandmother talk about her childhood days. Her grandmother told her, "In those days, we often found herds of Arabian oryxes grazing near our homes, mostly when the weather was cool. Life was not as easy at that time as it is now. People used to hunt animals, especially for their meat. Money from selling the hides and horns was an added bonus for hunting Arabian oryxes. Thus, they became an easy target.



“Luckily for the species, the authorities noticed the danger before it was too late and took immediate measures to save them from extinction.”



“My teacher told us that Arabian oryxes are being slowly reintroduced back into the desert. How wonderful will it be if some of them find their way to our neighborhood too!” sighed Salma wistfully. “Animals go to places where they can find food and safety,” said Grandmother with a wise smile.

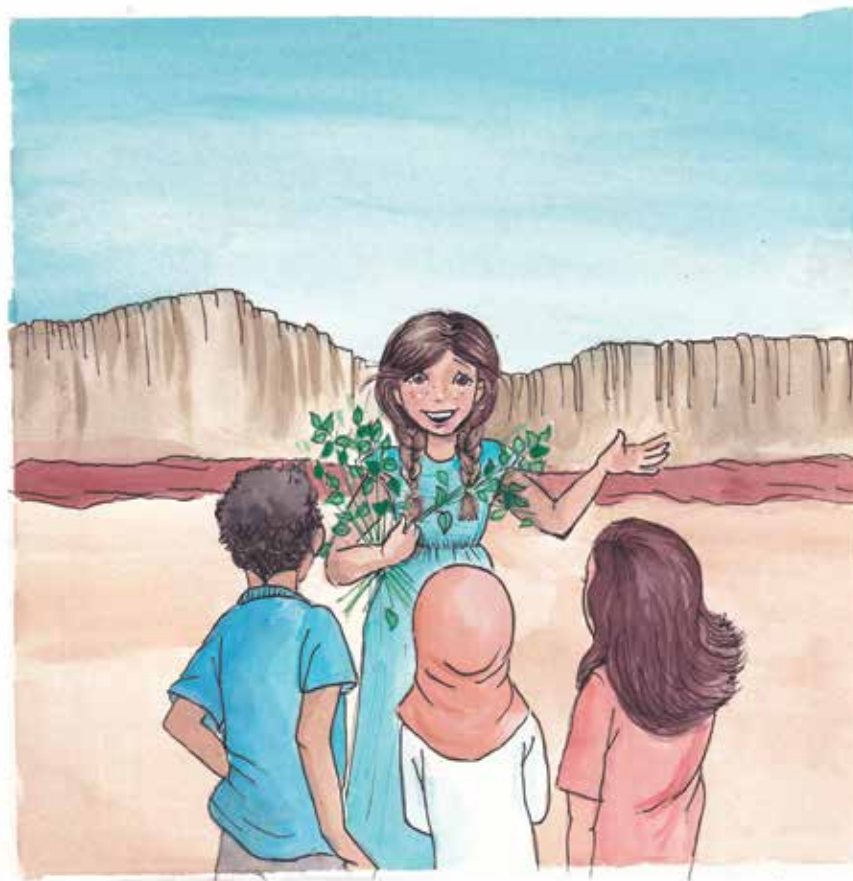
On their way back home, Salma thought up a plan. She wanted to create a safe habitat for animals near her home, and she decided that she would start by growing a few garden plants in the desert. Upon reaching home, she went to check if the stems of the rose plants were still there, where her mother had left them the day before.

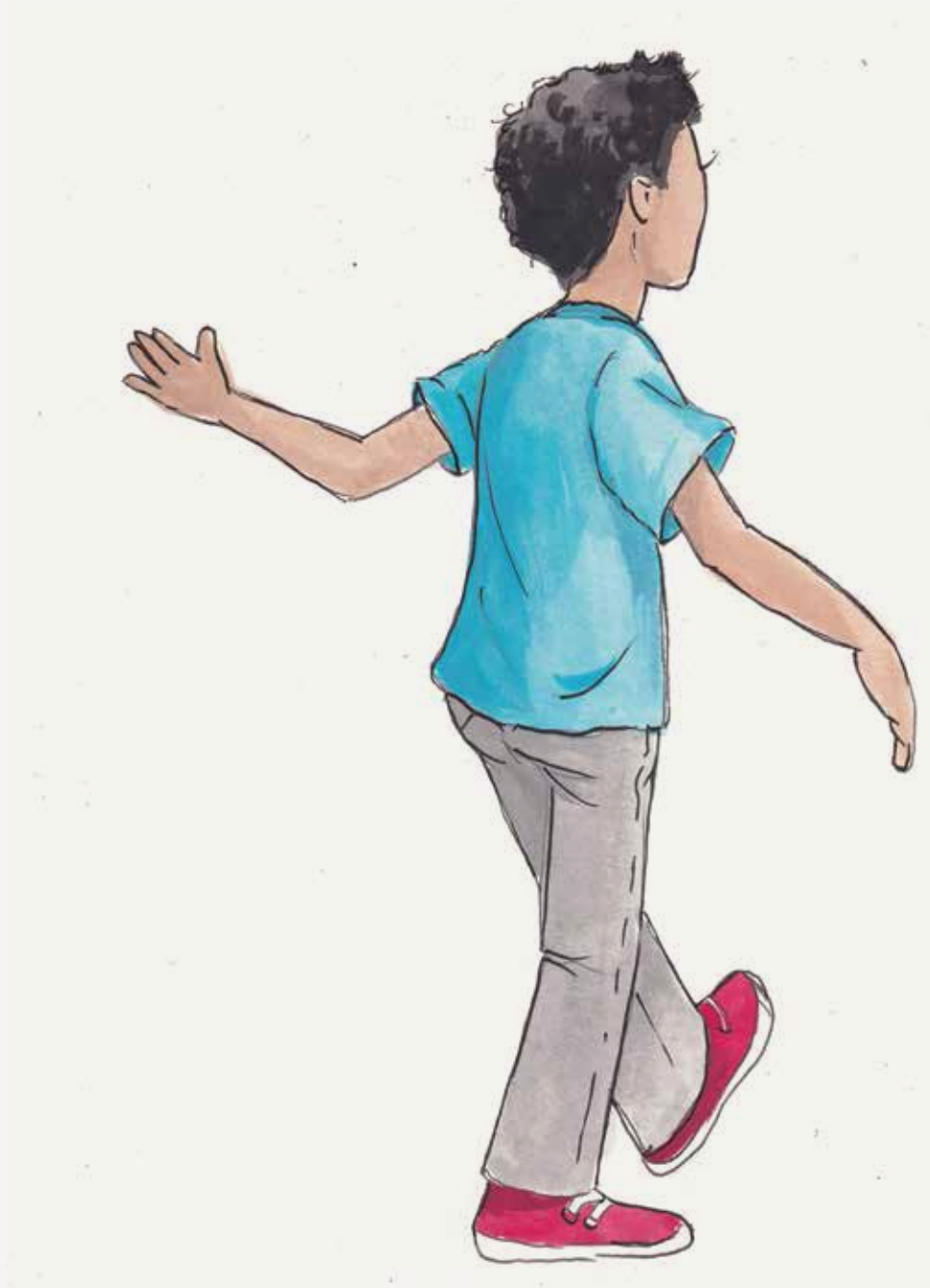




Yes! They were still there. Salma took some stems and went beyond the fence into the barren desert that stretched for miles.

Her friends, who were playing in their yards, came to check what she was up to. She described her dream to make their surroundings green and beautiful. They all agreed to help her. Well, all except Abdul, the troublemaker. “Girls and their stupid dreams and ideas! As silly as always! Do you really think that you can save the world by sticking a few stems in the sand?” he sneered.





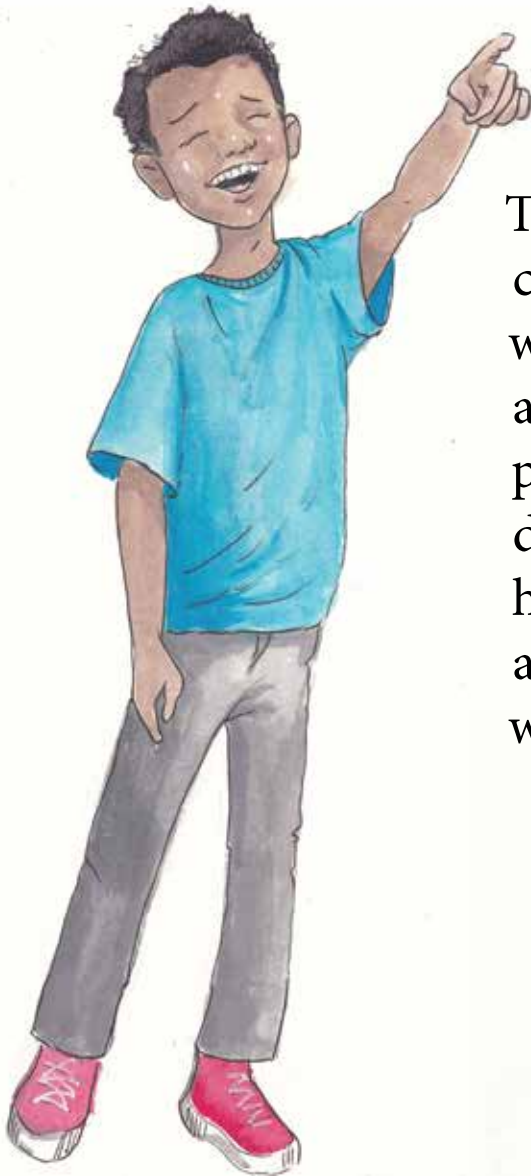
“At least we are trying!” replied Khadija. “Do you have a better idea, Abdul?” snapped Zarah. “Whatever! I’m off to play my new video game,” Abdul said and stormed off.





“We will show him that girls have the power to make our dreams come true too, same as the boys!” vowed Khadija. Salma and her friends planted the stems, watered them and went home satisfied.





The next evening, the friends went to check on their plants, armed with watering cans. But the sight that awaited them was very sad. All the plants looked wilted and about to die. Abdul was also there, laughing his head off. “Wow! Amazing job as always, girls!” he snickered and walked away.

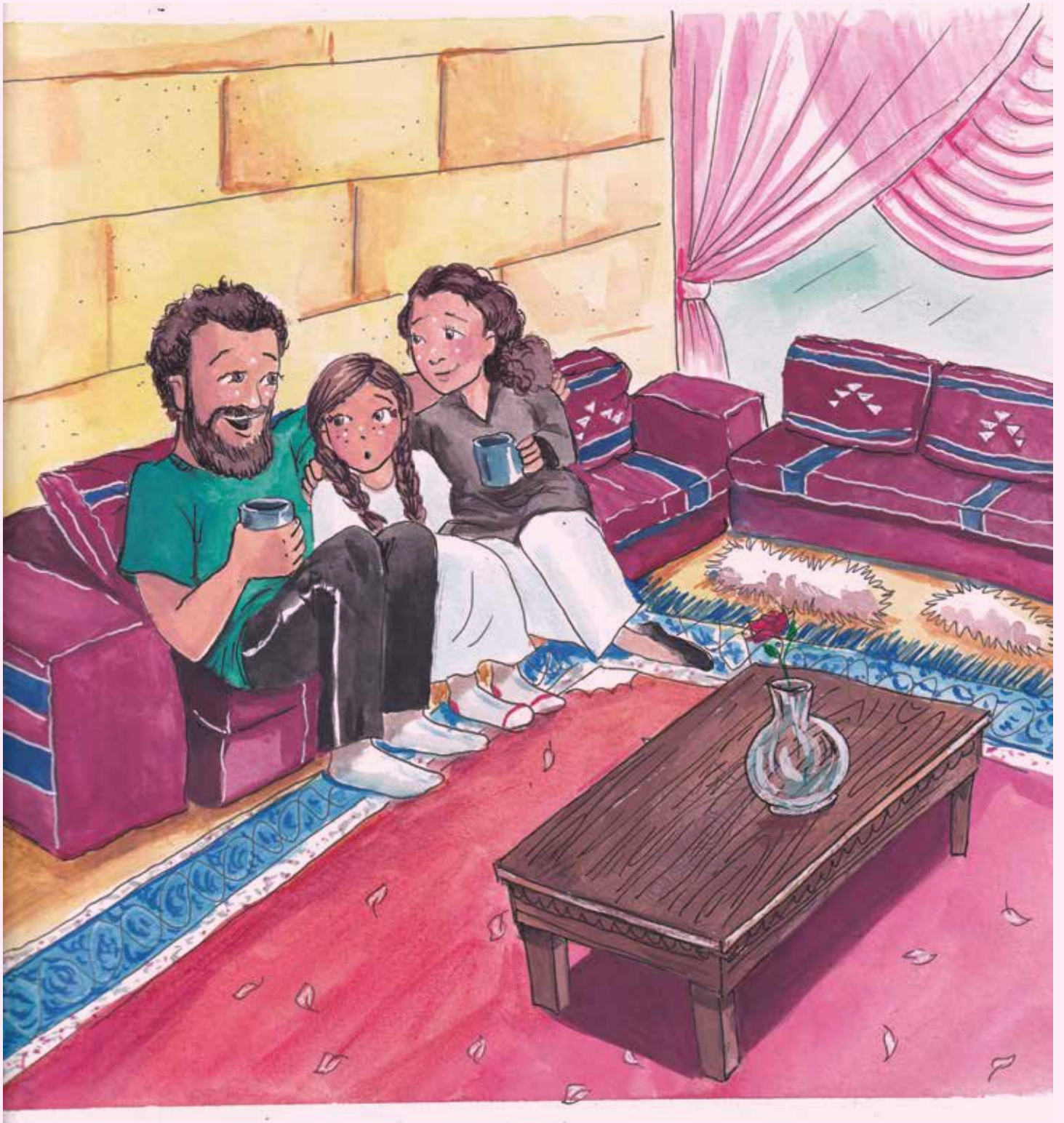




Salma felt like crying. “Hey! Don’t give up yet,” said Khadija, “I think I know what we did wrong. Before starting any project, there is something important that we should do. We all missed it.”



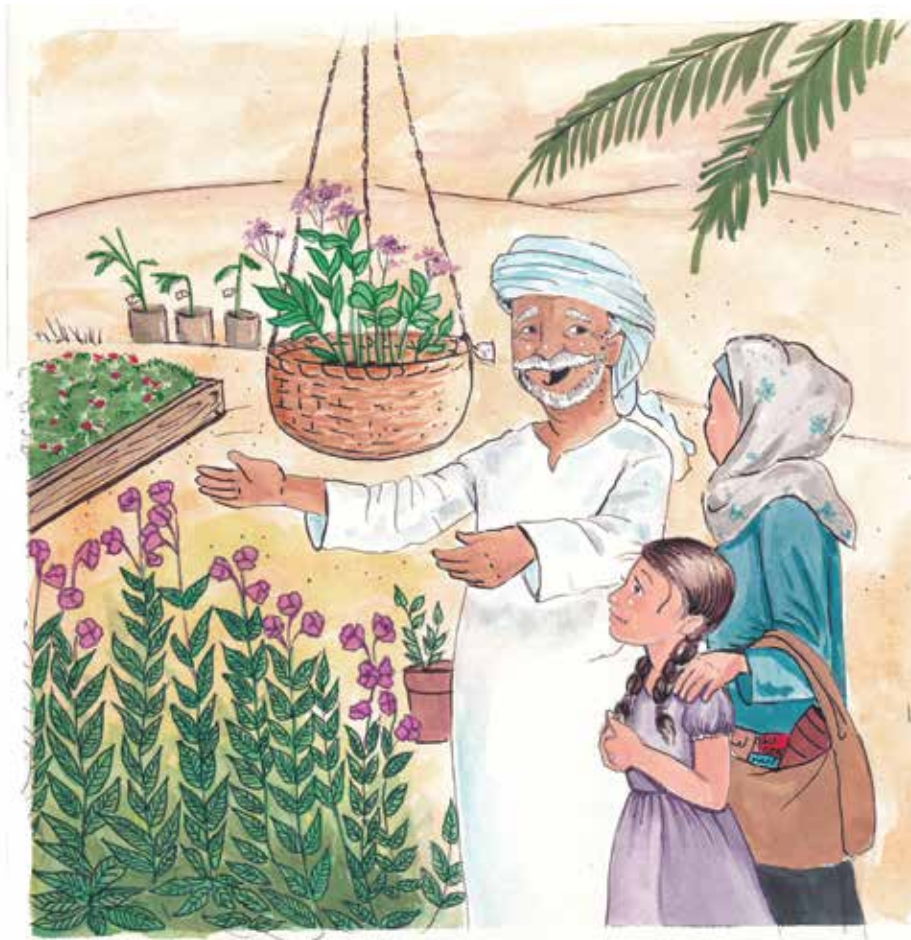
“RESEARCH!!!!” All of them exclaimed together. They had to find out which plants grow well in the desert. The gang decided to meet again the next weekend with their findings.





# Chapter 3

When Salma told her parents about what had happened, they assured her that there is no shame in failing. They also advised her that success comes to those who try again and again. Her mother then explained about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as they could serve as a potential inspiration for her project. Salma was thrilled to learn about different goals like **SDG 5: Gender Equality**, which ensures equal rights and opportunities to both boys and girls, **SDG 15: Life on Land**, for the protection of endangered animals and plants, and **SDG 17: Partnership for Goals**, which encourages everyone to work together in attaining the SDGs. There seems to be a Sustainable Development Goal to solve every problem in the world! The fact that people all over the globe were working together to achieve the SDGs gave Salma new-found motivation to pursue her project.



The next day, Salma's mother took her out after school. After a small shopping trip at the souq, they went to the nearby nursery called Al Khudra, where her mother got all the things they needed for their garden. The owner of Al Khudra was a very friendly old man, who was always ready to answer Salma's zillion questions about each and every plant and flower in his nursery. This time, Salma shared her dream with him. The kind old man listened with interest about her mission to create greenery all around them. When they were about to leave, he asked her to call him if she needed any help with her project.

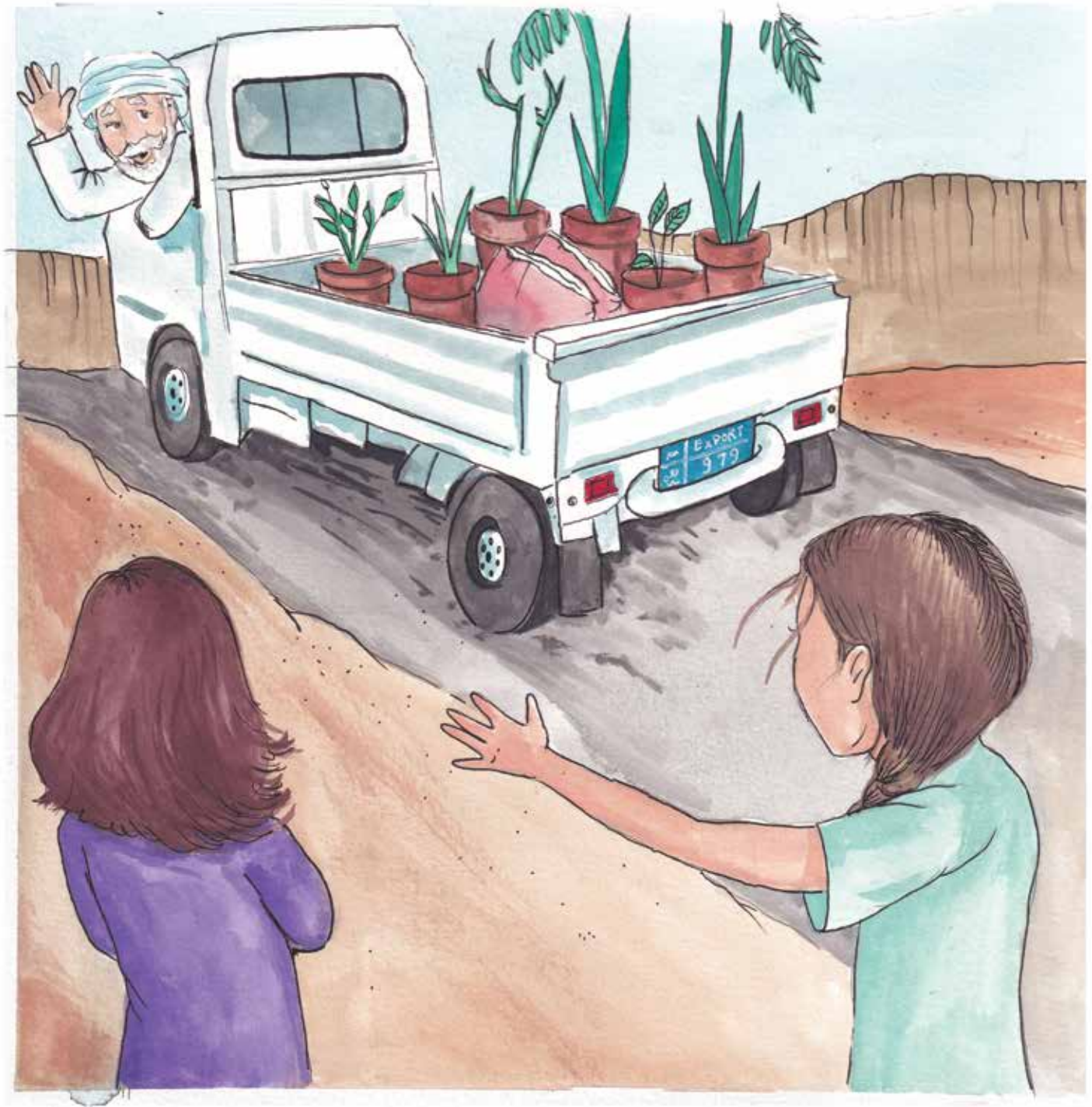






*“Shukran! Ma’assalama!”* Salma happily bid him goodbye.

That weekend, the friends met at Arabicana, the local café. Sipping on their favourite milkshakes and nibbling on yummy *samboosas* and *manakkish*, they discussed their findings at length. “So, the saplings we can use are date palm, juniper, frankincense, acacia, ghaf, and neem,” concluded Zarah. They all agreed. Salma went home and made a call to the kind old man at Al Khudra.



A few days later, while Salma and her mother were in the garden watering the plants, a truck drew up to the gate. It was the old man from the nursery. He had brought 20 saplings for Salma, a mix of Acacia, Ghaf, Date Palm and Neem.



She was delighted when the old man offered to show her how to plant them the proper way. Salma and the old man were followed by her parents and her friends.



They were armed with spades, trowels, manure, watering cans and the saplings. First, they made twenty pits, then they added manure and planted the saplings. They all took turns watering them.



Even Abdul was excited and wanted to help. “Oh! Not so fast, smarty-pants,” quipped Khadija. “First, you have to repeat ‘GIRLS ARE THE BEST’ three times, as an apology.” He did so with a grin, and everyone laughed goodheartedly.

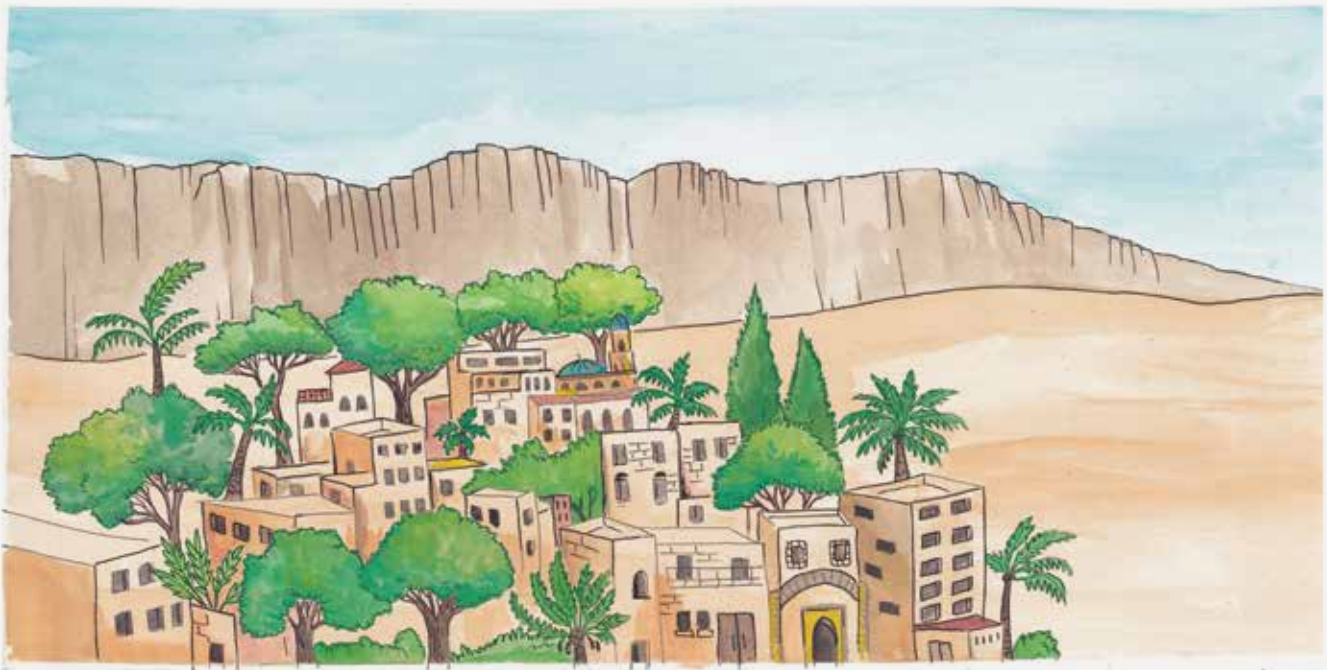


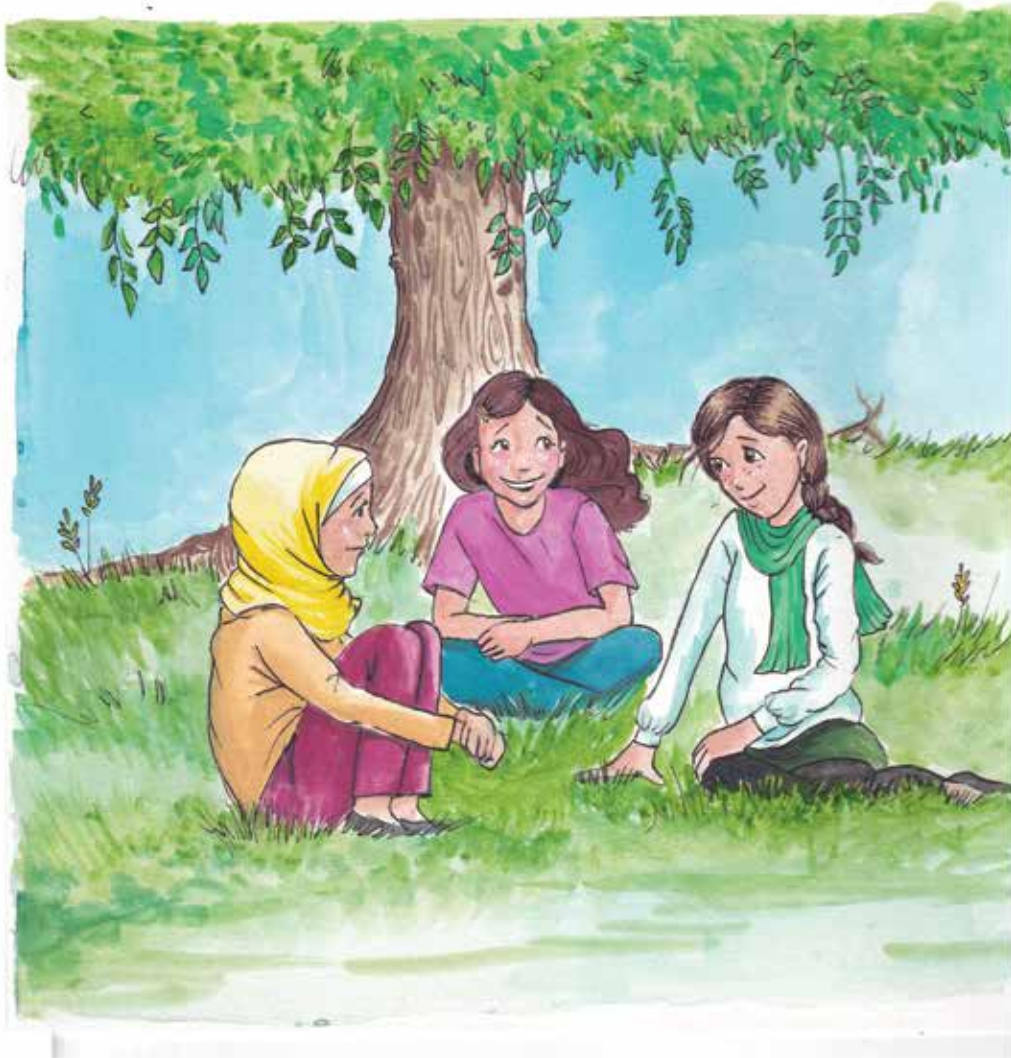
Salma thanked the old man and he left with a gentle reminder to water the saplings every day, and a promise to bring more saplings when she was ready.



# Epilogue

Years passed by, and the saplings they planted came to surround them as green trees. Encouraged by their success, her friends and neighbours started planting trees around their homes, too. The entire neighborhood had become an oasis. The air is fresh and clean.





Nowadays, the townspeople turn off the air conditioners and leave the windows wide open to enjoy the cool and fresh air. Salma and her friends usually spend their afternoons playing under the shade of the trees. Passersby often stop to wonder at the greenery in the middle of the desert. Salma encourages them all to go to her dear old friend's nursery and get some saplings.

At school, Salma was chosen to be captain of the Eco Club, and she is in charge of planting trees all around her school.





It's a fine afternoon. Salma is taking a walk through the trees with her parents. There is a mild breeze blowing, and the birds are pecking at the date fruits and chirping noisily. Suddenly, Salma sees a movement among the trees and stares curiously. She can't believe her eyes!

“Father, Mother! Look!” she exclaims as she points excitedly. There, grazing among the trees is a pair of Arabian oryxes. “Wow, Salma! Looks like your dream has really come true. Congrats, little warrior!” says her father.



“Warrior?” asks Salma curiously. Her mother smiles and whispers in her ear, “Yes dear, you are nature’s warrior, strong and fearless, fighting for a worthy cause. The Green Warrior!”



## about the author

**Saira** is an amiable 11-year-old girl from Cambridge International School, Dubai. She wrote her award-winning story at the age of 9, when she was at her previous school, Our Own English High School, Sharjah.

Saira is an avid reader, and it has motivated her to try her hand at writing stories and poems. She is passionate about the environment and her literary efforts in spreading awareness about the importance of recycling batteries have won her the most prestigious Environmental Excellence School Award – 2021.

Saira is an ardent lover of animals and a staunch vegetarian. She enjoys learning languages and can read and write in English, Arabic, French and Hindi and also understands Malayalam. She aspires to become a world-renowned author and a champion of nature and animals.



## about the illustrator

**Eman Salem** is a Palestinian-Canadian Illustrator and an Artist. She lives in Calgary, Alberta, with her husband and children. She has worked on several projects and published works at national and international levels.

Eman's artwork and illustrations are primarily in watercolour and pen and ink. Her illustrations are very whimsical, and she tries to always think of the reader when drawing. She loves the translucency of the watercolour paint and how it brings almost a glow to her finished pieces.

Eman studied art at the Alberta College of Art and Design. When she is not writing or drawing, she teaches art to a group of residents at a long-term care facility which she finds incredibly rewarding.



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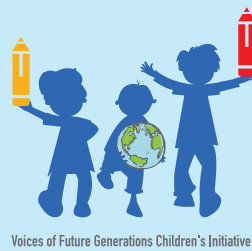
## **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

All children are holders of important human rights. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, over a hundred countries agreed on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the most important human rights treaty in history, they promised to protect and promote all children's equal rights, which are connected and equally important.

In the 54 Articles of the Convention, countries make solemn promises to defend children's needs and dreams. They recognize the role of children in realizing their rights, which requires that children be heard and involved in decision-making. In particular, Article 24 and Article 27 defend children's rights to safe drinking water, good food, a clean and safe environment, health, and quality of life. Article 29 recognizes children's rights to education that develops personality, talents and potential, respecting human rights and the natural environment.

— *Dr. Alexandra Wandel*  
World Future Council





Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative



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## Sustainable Development Goals Statement

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a bridge from the previous Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community in 2000 to the future. Construction of this bridge began in 2012 at the United Nations Rio+ 20 Conference on Sustainable Development. At this Conference, countries agreed that it was time to take concrete action for the present and the future by acting on issues such as climate change, poverty, inequality and biodiversity. This resulted in The Future We Want, a global statement of priorities and responsibilities for countries toward the people, environment, biodiversity and future.

In 2015, the bridge took shape in the form of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which countries agreed to implement between 2015 and 2030. The SDGs, as they are commonly called, comprise a set of 17 specific goals, over 160 targets within these goals, and hundreds of indicators to measure if the goals and targets are being met. The SDGs address the key issues that face our world community now and that will define this community in the future, such as poverty, climate change, education rights, gender equality, discrimination, health, food and water access and safety, and the promotion of justice for all members of society. Since 2015, children around the world have joined in efforts to incorporate the SDGs in their countries and communities, adding their voices and perspectives as future leaders. The SDGs show the power of all people, including children, to create positive and lasting change that addresses the needs of local and global society.

— *Dr. Alexandra R. Harrington*  
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law



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## Thanks and Inspiring Resources

### **'Voices of Future Generations' International Commission**

Warmest thanks to the International Commission, launched in 2014 by His Excellency Judge CG Weeramantry, UNESCO Peace Education Research Award Laureate, which supports, guides and profiles this new series of Children's Books Series, including Judge Marcel Szabo (Hungary), Prof. Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger (CISDL), Prof. Kirsten Sandberg (University of Oslo), Isobel Abulhoul OBE (Emirates Literature Foundation), Dr Kristiann Allen (New Zealand), Ms. Irina Bokova (Former Director-General UNESCO), Ms. Alexandra Wandel (WFC), Ms. Emma Hopkin / Ms. Hannah Rolls (UK), Ms. Julia Marton-Lefevre (IUCN), Prof. Carey Newman or Hayalthkin'geme (University of Victoria), Dr James Moody (Australia), Dr Christina Voigt (Norway), Dr Alexandra Harrington (CISDL).

### **'Voices of Future Generations' Goodwill Ambassadors and VoFG Team**

Most sincere appreciation to HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum (ELF / Middle East), Dr Ying-Shih Hsieh (EQPF / Asia), Dr Gabrielle Sacconaghi-Bacon (Moore Foundation / North America), Ms. Melinda Manuel (PNG), Adv. Neshan Gunasekera (VoFG), Dr Odeeth Lara-Morales (VoFG), Ms. Chiara Rohlfs (VoFG), Ms. Sarah Sanders (VoFG), Allison Lalla (VoFG), Hyfa Azzez (VoFG), Isabel Fernandez-McAuley (VoFG).

**The World Future Council** consists of 50 eminent global changemakers from across the globe. Together, they work to pass on a healthy planet and just societies to our children and grandchildren. ([www.worldfuturecouncil.org](http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org))

**United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)** strives to build networks among nations that enable humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity by mobilizing for education, building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation, and protecting freedom of expression. (<https://en.unesco.org/>)

**The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its three Optional Protocols, by its State parties. ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org))

**United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. ([www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org))

**International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** envisions a just world that values and conserves nature, working to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. ([www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org))

**Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL)** supports understanding, development and implementation of law for sustainable development by leading legal research through scholarship and dialogue and facilitating legal education through teaching and capacity-building. ([www.cisd.org](http://www.cisd.org))

**Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF)** established in 1984 is the premier ENGO in Taiwan. Implementing environmental education, tree plantation, and international participation through coordinating transdisciplinary resources to push forward environmental and sustainable development in our time.



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**World's Largest Lesson (WLL)** World's Largest Lesson brings the Global Goals to children all over the world and unites them in taking action. Since it was launched in September 2015, the World's Largest Lesson has reached over 130 countries and impacted over 8 million children each year. (<https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/>)

**Emirates Literature Foundation**, home of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization that supports and nurtures a love of literature in the UAE and across the region through a programme of varied cultural initiatives. Recognising the distinctive contribution that literature makes to children's lives, the Foundation focuses on introducing and cultivating a spirit of reading while acting as a catalyst for writing and cultural exchange. (<https://www.elfdubai.org/en/home>)

## **About the Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative**

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Voices of Future Generations Children's Book Series, led by the United Nations and a consortium of educational charities including the World Future Council (WFC), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), the Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF), the Fundacion Ecos and the Trust for Sustainable Living (TSL) among others, as well as the Future Generations Commissioners of several countries, and international leaders from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other international organizations, has launched the new Voices of Future Generations Series of Children's Books.

Every year we feature stories from our selected group of child authors, inspired by the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and the world's Sustainable Development Goals, and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself. Our junior authors, ages 8-12, are concerned about future justice, poverty, the global environment, education and children's rights. Accompanied by illustrations, each book profiles creative, interesting and adventurous ideas for creating a just and greener future, in the context of children's interests and lives.

We aim to publish the books internationally in ten languages, raising the voices of future generations and spread their messages for a fair and sustainable tomorrow among their peers and adults, worldwide. We welcome you to join us in support of this inspiring partnership, at [www.vofg.org](http://www.vofg.org).



This vivid and engaging story is a reawakening call. As an environmentalist and working on the UAE's afforestation programmes for 30 years, I fully identify with this narration. It engulfs the reader where a determined girl raises awareness and educates the entire community about the significance of tree planting. Passionately putting her thoughts into a book, Saira Thomas reminds us how the power of a young environmental steward can inspire everyone to save the Earth and the living beings that reside in it.

***Habiba Al Mar'ashi***

***Emirates Environmental Group, Chairperson***

I hope this beautiful story can inspire many children to follow their green dreams. It takes faith, it requires action, patience, and time, and in the end, dreams do come true. Making our world a better and greener place is a gift to future generations. Let's follow Salma's example, let's join hands with our friends and family and bring back nature into our lives.

***Tatiana Antonelli Abella***

***Founder & Managing Director, Goumbook***

We are a true tribe of storytellers. We learn from the wisdom of the past and act on the future.

The story flows from the past into the future of a world that we can imagine.

Life is too short to waste a day subscribing to what people think you can do instead of what you know you can do.

As Salma has shown, she pursued a dream, eventually bringing others with her on her journey, on her quest, on her just cause.

A lovely and uplifting story.

***Lachlan MacKinnon***

***CEO & Principal***

***Cambridge International School, Dubai***

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