

NOMINATION FORM: Global Business & Interfaith Peace Awards

Note: Nominations are open to CEOs (present or past) of companies who have championed interfaith understanding and peace.

Nominee Contact Information

- 1. Nominee Full Name: Aziz Abu Sarah and Scott Cooper
- 2. Corporate Title: Co-Founders/Co-CEOs
- 3. Company Name: MEJDI Tours
- 4. Company Headquarters Location (Country): Springfield, Virginia, USA
- 5. Engagement with the UN Global Compact and/or the Religions Freedom & Business Foundation*
 - Company is a signatory of the UN Global Compact
 - Company has joined Business for Peace
 - Company has signed the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation’s pledge to protect freedom of religion
 - Company intends to join one or more of the initiatives listed above in the next six months, please specify
MEJDI plans on joining the three initiatives listed above in the next 6 months.

* Nominees are invited to:

- 1. join the [UN Global Compact](#) and its [Business for Peace](#) platform and,
- 2. make the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation's [corporate pledge to protect freedom of religion or belief](#) (FoRB)

Nominator Contact Information

- 1. Nominator Full Name: MEJDI Staff
- 2. Corporate Title: MEJDI Staff
- 3. Company Name: MEJDI Tours LLC
- 4. Email Address: contact@mejditours.com
- 5. Phone Number: 703-349-1554
- 6. Relationship to the Nominee: Employees

Please submit a Biography of the Nominee (max 200 words)

Aziz Abu Sarah is an entrepreneur, speaker, peace builder and author. He is a National Geographic Explorer and a TED Fellow. In 2009, Aziz co-founded MEJDI Tours, a cultural exploration vehicle for an ever-changing travel market. In 2014, he gave a TED Talk about his vision for redefining tourism. Aziz has spoken at countless of international organizations and

universities, including The United Nations, Nexus, TED, BMW, and European Parliament. Aziz is the recipient of the Goldberg Prize for Peace in the Middle East from the Institute of International Education, the European Parliament's Silver Rose Award, and the Eisenhower Medallion. The Royal Strategic Centre in Jordan named him one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the World for 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. He won the Intercultural innovation award from the UN Alliance of Civilizations and the BMW Group. UNSG Ban Ki Moon also recognized him for his work in peace building. - Scott Cooper is a successful business owner, social entrepreneur, and business strategist, spent a decade in the private sector as a banker and financial representative for JP Morgan Chase, before joining George Mason University's (GMU) Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution as its co-executive director in 2009. Under Scott's direction, the center's budget grew 100-fold, and operated programs in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. The MEJDI co-founder and CEO established GMU's first business and conflict resolution program, and spearheaded an innovative study abroad program that takes students throughout the Middle East and beyond. He previously worked at the United States Institute of Peace on a project focused on evaluating peace-building programs in conflict zones, and has advised numerous NGOs on sustainable models for organizational growth. Scott holds a degree in political science from Arizona State University and a Master of Science degree in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University.

Information about the policy, programme or initiative

1. Please describe a policy, programme or initiative that the Nominee has launched or spearheaded to advance the company's efforts to champion interfaith understanding and peace (max 300 words)

The Middle East and Justice Development Initiative (MEJDI Tours), provides dual narrative, co-leading trips in which guides are required to engage in interfaith co-leadership in multiple aspects which allow them and the participating travelers to learn from different perspectives, about each other, and about religious interfaith collaboration while meeting with religious leaders from different backgrounds. MEJDI Tours is an interfaith and intercultural tour company running tours in numerous countries including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Turkey and Palestine. They seek to foster peace and cultural understanding through the promotion of tourism. In the Holy Lands, for instance, MEJDI runs the "Dual Narrative" tour, which is led by Israeli and Palestinian guides who offer their perspectives on culture, politics and religion at each tour location. This approach to peace building and understanding has gained additional support from organizations such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) which mentors the company as it works to build bridges between cultures.

2. Which category or categories does the policy, programme or initiative fall into:

- ✓ Core business
- ✓ Social investment & philanthropy
- Advocacy and public policy engagement
- ✓ Partnership and collective action

3. Does the policy, programme or initiative address any of the following related to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)¹:

¹ Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

- ✓ Promote sustainable and innovative business through protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)
- ✓ Non-discrimination and/or non-harassment on the basis of religion or belief
- ✓ Religious accommodation and inclusion
- ✓ Protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the community
- Other (describe below, max. 25 words)
Click here to enter text.

4. Please describe the objective of the policy, programme or initiative and the need, goal or gap that it was designed to address. (max 200 words)

MEJDI intends to disrupt the travel industry as a whole and make social impact just as normal of a box to check as what to see, where to stay, and what to eat. One way we do that is through the dedication of providing customized itineraries for travel groups as diverse as our destinations, MEJDI Tours is full-service tour company-differentiating itself from the crowd through exclusive access, authentic experiences, extraordinary customer service, and much more – founded on the belief that tourism should be a vehicle for a more positive and interconnected world. MEJDI-which translates to both “honor” and “respect”-was established to achieve one goal: change the face of tourism through a socially responsible business model that honors both clients and communities.

5. How was the policy, programme or initiative implemented? What role did the Nominee play? (max 200 words)

MEJDI tours offer dual-narrative guides are implemented in Israel and Palestine, Ireland, and various countries in which travelers are able to engage with the communities that they travel to as well as having the unique experiences of interacting with refugees from various backgrounds. The nominees are in charge of developing and promoting the content of these initiatives.

6. What were/are the most persistent challenges in implementing the policy, programme or initiative? How were they/are they being overcome and what was the role of the Nominee? (max 200 words)

Tour guides are usually not used to work in pairs; especially when that means that they are responsible for talking about controversial issues on politics, religion and history that they would normally disagree on. To be able to have them successfully work together and facilitate discussion, MEJDI implemented our own training of our guides that included not only just lecturing and guiding, but also facilitation and peace-building skills.

7. What are the key lessons learned from launching the policy, programme or initiative? (max 200 words)

Many people who are interested in this kind of travel where they learn from and able to influence local communities. We believe that business is the key way to work for peace and interfaith understanding because it is much more sustainable method to do peace building. Having people from across divides working together in the company has not only made our employees friends, but have also created a community across dividing lines resulting our staff relationships to go beyond our professional interactions.

Impact and Reporting on Progress

1. How do you monitor and evaluate progress on the policy, programme or initiative? If relevant, what indicators and metrics are used? (max 200 words)

Through evaluation with interviews and surveys we test attitudes, behaviors prevention. Anecdotally, we have seen a variety of peace and social justice related projects created by participants and staff after their participating on our trips, which have attributed to their experiences. Currently, one of our staff members first heard about MEJDI when she took participated with her university to the Turkey destination. After which, she interned with MEJDI on their National Geographic Holy Land tour and now she works as a full time staff member.

2. What outcomes or impact have been reached to date? Please be as specific as possible and supply available data. (max 200 words)

We have had thousands of travelers go with us to our destinations. Currently we are designing and implementing travel abroad programs for about a dozen universities in which our initiative is integrated in curriculums at universities all over the United States. These trips have influenced travelers in a way that they could be exposed to multiple facets of that country while allowing them to engage and critically think about the places that they visited. Through hands on experiences conversations of the participants have shifted whether it be through marketing the Holy Land tour in the National Geographic catalogue (which reaches thousands of customers) or influencing competitors to put out trips similar to our model, MEJDI has allowed people who see a trips to the Holy Land differently because of the unique dual-narrative component that we specialize in. In addition, non-profits, global emergent projects have been founded by our participants in addition to organizations have used our dual-narrative model that has continued to promote competition in this business field and facilitate positive social change.

3. Is the Nominee's company reporting on its practices, policies, programmes and/or initiatives to champion interfaith understanding and peace? If so, please provide relevant weblink(s) for posting on the Awards' website. If integrated into the company's corporate sustainability report, Global Compact COP or GRI Report, please indicate relevant pages and/or sections. (max 200 words)

MEJDI professional promotes and pays to be audited every two years for their certification with B-Corp to specifically audit the company's social responsibility. In addition, Aziz Abu Sarah is constantly traveling to various lectures, talks, conferences, and talks with media to keep the conversation and our initiative alive in the world. Finally, travelers and group leaders play an integral part in reporting their personal experiences and shifts in worldviews through blog posts during their trip and participating in our post-trip surveys.

Additional Information:

1. Are there additional actions the Nominee has taken on an individual level to support interfaith understanding and peace within the organization? If so, please specify. (max 200 words)

Aziz and Scott were the executive directors of Center for World Religions Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution in which they worked in Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Israel/Palestine, Jordan on many projects mainly dealing with interfaith and

intrafaith. Aziz also used to host a radio show for 3 years with an Israeli partner and they have tackled interfaith issues in their project.

2. How has the Nominee taken action to support and promote the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles? If so, please specify. (max 200 words)

MEJDI intentionally try to create progressive societal change through integrating and engaging in local businesses. This is emphasized in our relationships with our partners, the activities that we offer on our trips, and our sustainable relationships with our suppliers.

Please provide any additional information to be considered. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Nominations team nominations@religiousfreedomandbusiness.org

Please also consider the following: TED Radio Hour 2016: "Beyond Tolerance" (aired April 22nd, 2016); TED Article 2016: "How I Learned to Forgive my Brother's Murderers"; MEJDI Tours Featured in Brazil Travel Blog-The Green Travel, 2015; Aziz Abu Sarah interviewed and featured in the movie "HUMANS", 2015; TED Talk 2014: "For more tolerance, we need more...tourism?" National Geographic Interview "Lessons from the Holy Land" interview with Aziz Abu Sarah, 2013