



Donor's stories

HASSAN ELMASRY

Hassan Elmasry is co-founder of Independent Franchise Partners, LLP and co-chair of Human Rights Watch. Find out why he supports an organisation that works to hold abusive governments and organisations accountable.

The seed of philanthropy was sown in Hassan Elmasry from a young age. The American-born Egyptian learned early that he had a duty to help those with less. Today, he is the co-founder of Independent Franchise Partners, LLP, and co-chair of Human Rights Watch (HRW), a global organisation that works to hold abusive governments and organisations accountable. Here, he shares how his background and education have played an important role in shaping his philanthropic priorities.



"Like many people, I really don't care for bullies – and I want to help those who stand up to them. My first exposure to HRW was in the early 2000s when I came to London to work. I was immediately taken with its efforts, mainly in the Middle East, but also in the areas of women's and children's rights. I was impressed how such a small group of committed professionals and volunteers could help frame the conversation globally on issues that I care about deeply.

As a patient, long-term investor, supporting human rights is a good fit between my values and the organisation's mission. It is almost by definition high-risk, high-return philanthropy – you can work on a human rights problem for a long time with no signs of progress, but then get a massive payoff when policies are changed or a dictator is overthrown.



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The more I got to know the staff and volunteers at HRW, the more I was impressed with the clarity of the organisation's mission, the quality of its research and advocacy work. And I could see lots of evidence that their efforts were having an impact – whether it was the global treaty to ban landmines; the arrest and trial of an especially abusive autocrat in a particular country; or the project to reduce the number of child soldiers worldwide.



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I was developing capacity to give at a greater level and, over time, HRW grew into my primary philanthropic effort. This means I support the organisation with my time, my network of contacts and financially. As a donor and volunteer, the clearly defined mission is important to me, as is the quality of the people. I know that my giving makes a difference. In the case of HRW, it doesn't take any corporate or government money to maintain its objectivity, so support from individuals like me is critical.

I see my support for HRW as a strategic investment to help people protect their dignity. Its work speaks to my heart as well as my mind. Freedom, human rights, and rule of law are critical ingredients in the soup that promotes economic development and human dignity.

The organisation has grown dramatically over the ten years that I have known it and that has allowed it to step into new areas and tackle problems in countries that we could not cover previously. For me personally, that is very gratifying.

Growing up, I was lucky enough to get to see the world through two very different lenses – a US lens and an Egyptian lens. My parents were born and raised in Egypt. After finishing college, they won scholarships to study for their PhDs in the United States. I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. I chose to return to Egypt for a year during my college year of study abroad.

My parents saw themselves first and foremost as Egyptians and Muslims. They very much felt we all have a duty to look after those less fortunate than ourselves. My Dad was the only one out of his seven siblings who finished post-graduate studies or went overseas. Thanks to his hard work and education, he earned far more than his older brothers. He felt that this meant that he carried a special responsibility to care for his parents and younger siblings. Even at a young age I was aware that he was setting aside money to look after them.



“I think of my giving as a strategic investment to help people protect their freedom and dignity.”

He passed away when I was 16 and I knew that left a financial gap for them because he was the one carrying them on his shoulders. When I started working, I felt that, since I was able, I had to step in and fill that gap. In this sense, my early giving was really about stepping up to fill my father’s shoes.

My mother also played an important role in forming my thoughts around philanthropy. Despite a demanding full-time job and raising two sons on her own, she engaged in all kinds of volunteer activities in support of our local mosque, the wider Middle Eastern immigrant community in our area, and local civic organisations. I grew up with a very real example that if you have the ability, then you should be doing something.

I also felt I had a deep obligation to my alma mater, the College at the University of Chicago. My education there had been an enormously transformative experience. Early in my career, I made a personal pledge that I would contribute a fixed percentage of my income every year to help the College provide a similar experience for other students. To me, that just seemed basic fairness.

My advice to others contemplating their giving strategy is to pick a cause that resonates with you. Take time and get to know the organisation. Be clear about how you will evaluate impact and do it on a regular basis. Finally, stay engaged with the cause and the organisation you support.”



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