



2018 - The Year of ITI



*Original version*

## **World Theatre Day Message 2018 – Arab Countries**

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It's a moment of communion, an unrepeatable encounter, not found in any other secular activity. It's the simple act of a group of people choosing to come together in the same place at the same time to take part in a shared experience. It's an invitation to individuals to become a collective, to share ideas, and envision ways to divide the burden of necessary actions... to slowly recover their human connectedness and find similarities rather than differences. It's where a specific story can trace the lines of universality... Here lies the magic of theatre; where representation recovers its archaic properties.

In a global culture of rampant fear of the other, isolation and loneliness, being present together, viscerally, in the here and now, is an act of love. Deciding to take your time, away from immediate gratification and individual self-indulgence in our highly consumerist fast-paced societies; to slow down, to contemplate and reflect together is a political act, an act of generosity.

After the fall of major ideologies, and as the current world order is proving its failure decade after decade, how can we re-imagine our future? As safety and comfort are the main preoccupation and priority in predominant discourses, can we still engage in uncomfortable conversations? Can we cross over towards dangerous territories without the fear of losing our privileges?

Today, speed of information is more important than knowledge, slogans are more valuable than words and images of corpses are more revered than real human bodies. Theatre is here to remind us that we are made of flesh and blood, and that our bodies have weight. It is here to awaken all our senses, and to tell us that we don't need to seize and consume with our sight alone. Theatre is here to give back the power and meaning to words, to steal the discourse back from politicians and restore it to its rightful place... to the arena of ideas and debate, the space of collective vision.

Through the power of storytelling and imagination theatre gives us new ways of seeing the world and each other; opening up a space for common reflection amidst the overwhelming ignorance of intolerance. When xenophobia, hate speech and white supremacy have effortlessly come back on the table, after the years of hard work and sacrifices of millions of people around the globe to make them shameful and deem them unacceptable... When teenage boys and girls are shot in the head and imprisoned for refusing to comply with injustice and apartheid... When figures of insanity and right-wing despotism are ruling some of the major countries of the first world... When nuclear war is looming as a virtual game between the man-children in power... When mobility is becoming more and more restricted to a selected few, while refugees are dying at sea, trying to enter the high fortresses of illusive dreams, as more and more expensive walls are being built... Where shall we question our world, when most of the media has sold out? Where else than in the intimacy of the theatre, are we able to re-think our human condition, to imagine the new world order... collectively, with love and compassion but also with constructive confrontation through intelligence, resilience and strength.

Coming from the Arab region I could speak of the difficulties artists face in making work. But I am part of a generation of theatre makers who feel privileged that the walls we need to destroy have always been visible ones. This has led us to learn to transform what is available and to push collaboration and innovation to its limits; making theatre in basements, on rooftops, in living rooms, in alleyways, and on the streets, building our audiences as we go, in cities, villages and refugee camps. We've had the advantage to have to construct everything from scratch in our contexts, and to conceive ways to evade censorship, all the while still crossing the red lines and defying taboos. Today these walls are facing all theatre makers of the world, as funding has never been scarcer and political correctness is the new censor.

Thus, the international theatre community has a collective role to play today more than ever, to face these multiplying tangible and intangible walls. Today more than ever there is a need to creatively re-invent our social and political structures, with honesty and courage. To confront our shortcomings, and to take responsibility for the world we take part in making.

As theatre makers of the world, we don't follow an ideology or one belief system, but we have in common our eternal search for truth in all its forms, our continuous questioning of the status quo, our challenge of systems of oppressive power and last but not least, our human integrity.

We are many, we are fearless and we are here to stay!