

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Comic Book Builds a Bridge Between Syria and the United States

Youth with Disabilities Create a New Superhero That Transcends Political and Cultural Differences

9 February 2011 (Damascus, Syria)- A new comic book launched today will introduce children around the world to the Silver Scorpion, a cross-cultural superhero with a disability, whose superpowers know no boundaries. The new "Silver Scorpion" comic book, the product of a partnership between The Open Hands Initiative and Liquid Comics, will be distributed to children in Syria on February 9, and will launch in the United States in March. The Open Hands Initiative was honored to welcome Her Excellency Mrs. Asma Al-Assad, First Lady of the Syrian Arab Republic, to the launch event at Dar Al-Assad for Culture and Arts. A welcome supporter of the Open Hand Initiative from its beginning, Mrs. Assad met privately with the Syrian youth with disabilities who helped create the comic, and previously attended last year's Youth Ability Summit.

In August, youth with disabilities from the United States and Syria served as unlikely diplomats when they met for the first time at the "Youth Ability Summit" in Damascus, sponsored by The Open Hands Initiative, a comprehensive private effort to engage the people of the US with Syria and the wider Arab and Muslim world. The children were encouraged to work together to create a superhero who reflected what they wanted to see in a comic book. By the end of the summit, the character of "Bashir," a boy who lost his legs in a tragic accident, was conceived. Bashir finds a mystical new power that transforms him into the Silver Scorpion, and must make tough decisions about how to use his abilities to overcome stereotypes and fight for equality, justice and social harmony.

American businessman Jay T. Snyder, founder of the Open Hands Initiative, says, "There is no better time than now for America to show common cause and expand relationships with the people of the Arab and Muslim world. What is truly amazing about this comic book is not just that it features a superhero with disabilities as the main character, but that it was inspired by youths who came from the United States and Syria. They had never met before. They spoke different languages. They had different cultures and backgrounds. The Silver Scorpion shows that when we come together in areas of mutual interest, we can find common ground and create amazing new products- such as giving the world a role model that transcends our differences."

Liquid Comics CEO Sharad Devarajan says Bashir's superpowers go even further. "Our hope is that the Silver Scorpion will serve as a positive role model who will help eliminate the political and social rhetoric between the West and the Arab region. Bashir also illustrates that children can overcome the perception of their disabilities as a weakness, and instead find empowerment in them. No one is more marginalized in any population than the disabled, so we believe this initiative will strike a powerful chord among everyday people in Syria and around the world."

The comic premiered in Damascus at a major launch event at the Damascus Opera Theatre, Dar Al-Assad for Culture and Arts. A packed house of more than 1,000 school children, health and education organizations, government and diplomatic officials, witnessed a special screening of the Silver Scorpion, featuring the voice of famous Syrian actor Kosai Khaulil as Bashir.

The ten American children who participated in the Youth Ability Summit that led to the creation of the “Silver Scorpion” say Bashir is the character they’d longed to see on the pages of a comic book. “The Silver Scorpion illustrates that no matter if you are in Damascus or Des Moines, at the end of the day, we all share the same hopes and dreams,” said Sarah Funes, a teenager from South San Francisco, California. “Creating this comic has united our small group from two different worlds forever as part of a unique community, and we cannot wait to share our experiences and creation with the world.”

Syrian students who took part in the summit said that the collaboration with American children was life-changing. “It made me feel that I have to improve my life,” said Abdulrahman Hussein, who wants to learn English so he can meet more people and better communicate with his new American friends.

50,000 Arabic copies of the initial Silver Scorpion comic will be distributed freely in schools, youth centers, cafes, and UNICEF offices throughout Syria and several other Arab countries. The comic will make its English-language debut in the United States in late March at a special launch event in Washington DC, featuring a special movie screening of the first edition voiced by prominent celebrities. The comic will also be made available digitally and in hard copy format for free on a number of partner websites, iPad and iPhone apps, and through National Free Comic Book Day this May. There will be new issues over the coming months, introducing new characters, stories, and challenges inspired by real-life experiences and collaborations.

The Open Hands Initiative was launched in 2009 after President Barack Obama called for an effort for Americans to reach out to the Muslim world. Working with partners AAMAL Syrian Organization for the Disabled, dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities living life in full, Light & Flowers, Al Safina, and the Victor Pineda Foundation, the Open Hands Initiative has made a dialogue between the people of Syria and the United States possible.

“As a leading Syrian NGO undertaking pioneering work in the disability field, we are proud to be part of this initiative and believe it will become a cornerstone in the cultural bridge between Syria and the U.S. We are excited to continue working with the Open Hands Initiative and supporting the organization’s ongoing work in Syria,” said Dr. Rami Khalil, Executive Director of AAMAL Syrian Organization for the Disabled.

Added Snyder, “If the people of our countries can join hands and work together to improve the condition of the most marginalized people in the world, then anything is possible.”

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About The Open Hands Initiative

The Open Hands Initiative is a US-based non-profit organization dedicated to improving people-to-people understanding and friendship throughout the world through exchanges and other projects that emphasize our basic shared values and common humanity. It specializes in diplomacy that is by and for ordinary people, emphasizing dialogue and mutual respect between the people of the United States and the rest of the world.

www.OpenHandsInitiative.org

About Liquid Comics

Liquid Comics is an entertainment company focused on creating original stories and modern myths for worldwide audiences. The company was founded by entrepreneurs, Gotham Chopra, Sharad Devarajan and Suresh Seetharaman and uses the medium of graphic novel publishing to develop properties for theatrical live-action films, animation and video games. Liquid has created original graphic novels with internationally acclaimed filmmakers and creators. The Company also currently has a number of international film and television projects in development.

www.LiquidComics.com