



OPEN
HANDS
INITIATIVE

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Private US Foundation Extends "Open Hand" to Syria

Adopting Obama's mantra, major public diplomacy effort—including jointly developed superheroes, art, and music—promotes bilateral cooperation

1 August 2010 (Damascus, Syria) - American businessman and philanthropist Jay T. Snyder has launched a comprehensive private effort to engage the people of the US with Syria and the wider Arab and Muslim world. "The Open Hands Initiative"-- a reference to President Obama's extension of an "open hand" to anyone who will take it in friendship-- will create a platform for exchanges between artists, entrepreneurs, and youth with disabilities. The Initiative is launching in Syria this week, featuring a conference of American and Syrian youth with disabilities who will jointly create the world's first cross-cultural superhero with disabilities for a comic book series to be published and distributed throughout the world.

"I have long believed that the private sector can play a unique role in diplomacy by engaging people in the spheres of everyday life. The Open Hands Initiative aims to be a catalyst for finding common ground between America and the Arab and Muslim world, and taking what is different about our cultures to build friendships and create something entirely new, like a superhero that reflects shared values. For example, we are bringing together youth with disabilities because they have the same hopes and challenges everywhere, but have unique cultural perspectives to share. It's a perfect area for dialogue and creativity."

The comic series, which will promote equality, inclusion, and cooperation, will eventually expand to contemporary issues in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Through creating positive and culturally sensitive role models, the series will seek to raise awareness of common human values and enable youth to better handle difficult real world situations.

Partnering with the Open Hands Initiative to create and publish the comic books will be Liquid Comics, an entertainment company which uses the medium of graphic novels to create original stories and modern myths for worldwide audiences. Liquid has created graphic novels with a number of acclaimed filmmakers, authors, musicians and creators and has also pioneered a new wave of characters and heroes from young South Asian artists and writers.

Speaking on the initiative, Liquid Comics CEO Sharad Devarajan said, "This is an opportunity to work with young people in the Muslim and Arab world to create new superheroes that are emblematic of

their unique and rich culture. Our hope is that these fictional heroes will also serve as positive role models to youths in the region and help eliminate the hateful and divisive messages from extremists like Bin Laden. 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.”

Among the launch programs in Syria, the Open Hands Initiative is hosting the “Youth Ability Summit” which brings American and Syrian youth disability advocates together to share experiences and create strategies for promoting the rights of youth with disabilities. Interactive and peer-to-peer sessions with US & Syrian children, parents, educators, and experts, will take place in Damascus and serve as the meeting grounds for these exchanges. Youth will work together with artists and experts to create the innovative comic series for promoting equality and inclusion while reflecting common Syrian and American values. Partnering in the Summit are the Victor Pineda Foundation, an educational non-profit organization that promotes the rights and dignities of young people with disabilities, and AAMAL Syrian Organization for the Disabled, dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities living life in full.

Hazem Ibrahim, Secretary General of Syria's National Council for Disability Affairs, commented on the Initiative, "I am thrilled that the Open Hands Initiative is making such a dialogue possible between the community of the disabled of Syria and the United States. If countries can join hands and work together to improve the condition of the most marginalized people in the world, then anything is possible. I sincerely hope this will be just the first of many long overdue conversations between the people of our two countries. I personally cannot underestimate the value of cross-cultural communication which is so needed in today's world.”

The Summit will also produce the first cross-cultural guidebook for implementing the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities authored jointly by disability experts in Syria and America and to be used by Syrian, American, and global disability advocates. Continued dialogue will continue through dedicated forums on the Open Hands website.

“I have long believed that the private sector has the power to inspire a deeper level of trust and understanding,” added Jay Snyder. “Together, the people of the US and Syria have the power to take what is best about our societies and share them. In so doing, we seek to enrich each other, deepen our interdependence and respect, and build a reservoir of goodwill that can withstand even the most fundamental policy differences.”

Also being launched is a project to bring Syria's rich and vibrant art and music scene to American audiences, and foster new collaborations that fuse both cultures.

The Open Hands Initiative is partnering with ECHO Musical Cultural Association, a registered Syrian non-profit, non-government, cultural musical arts society, to facilitate the production, distribution, and exchange of local Syrian music.

Later this year, The Open Hands Initiative will bring together prominent American artists to Damascus to co-teach young Syrian artists with Syrian counterparts. The works resulting from this workshop will be exhibited in Syria and the US through partnerships with top art galleries in both countries.

Over the course of the coming months, the Open Hands Initiative will expand its programs into other countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its programs will focus on health, disability, women, art, music, and literature.

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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

About the Victor Pineda Foundation

The Victor Pineda Foundation (VPF) is an educational non-profit organization that promotes the rights and dignities of young people with disabilities. Our fieldwork and research initiatives further an inclusive human and civil rights approach to disability programs and policies. We work to build inclusive societies where young people with disabilities can develop their talents, skills and abilities and reach their full potential.

www.PinedaFoundation.org