



Press Release  
2 September 2015

### **Ruya Foundation Announces Drama Therapy Production at Theatre in Iraq**

The Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq (Ruya) has launched a drama therapy project for children and young people with funding from the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development. The project will culminate in a performance at the Muntada Theatre in Baghdad on 2 October 2015 by a group of 15 participants between the ages of 12 and 17. The group, named Step, has worked on all aspects of production for *Girls of Baghdad*, including staging, lighting, set design, costume design, acting and scriptwriting. The members of Step were selected by Ruya from an orphanage in Baghdad.

In March, Ruya invited Lebanese drama therapist and award-winning filmmaker Zeina Daccache (Catharsis) to train six Iraqi theatre professionals, who already possessed extensive experience working with children in schools or theatres, in a five-day drama therapy workshop. These professionals then brought their training to bear on the four-month-long production period for *Girls of Baghdad*.

Drama therapy is not practised in Iraq so Ruya aimed to enable its introduction as an aid to children who have suffered emotional trauma or been exposed to situations of extreme violence. The local professionals were taught to use drama and other artistic media to help children regain peace and motivation and their training was focused specifically on working with children who may have lost one or more of their parents or been exposed to extreme abuse.

Drama was chosen as the main tool for the project due both to its historical recognition as a cathartic act and to increasing levels of evidence pointing to art therapy as a reliable way of helping children manage trauma. The desired outcome of drama therapy is different for each child, but the fundamental aim in this project is to promote healing and growth through the use of role playing and dramatic interactions.

A 'drama' can be both a personal and a public experience. Aristotle identified catharsis as the purgation of emotions, especially of pity and fear, by way of art. The professionals learned how to encourage children to use drama as a method of describing and 'acting out' their experiences. In preliminary workshops children created plays that involved the participation and cooperation of a small number of peers. Play, movement, voice, painting, storytelling, dramatisation and performance art all have central roles in encouraging children to explore their creativity, allowing them to recreate themselves, discover their personalities, enhance their abilities to play and feel free to be children.

As it is the frequent experience of drama therapists that not all children are comfortable with dramatic activities, the training also covered other methods used in wider art therapy, such as music, writing, drawing and the making of objects to represent things and images. All of these methods were employed by the professionals throughout their

work with the children and young people to mount the production of *Girls of Baghdad*.

Ruya aims to support similar programmes in the future to train further professionals in the field. The Foundation would then be able to organise projects at orphanages, schools and youth houses in Baghdad as well as in other cities across Iraq.

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### **Notes to Editors:**

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*Girls in Baghdad* previews at 6.30 pm on 2 October 2015 at the Muntada Theatre, Rasheed Street, Baghdad.

### **About Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq**

Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq (Ruya) is an Iraqi-registered not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 2012 by Iraq art and culture enthusiasts with the aim of aiding and enriching culture in Iraq, and building cultural bridges with the world. Ruya's fundamental aim is to promote culture in Iraq – a mission with particular significance at a time when priorities are focused elsewhere – and to build a sustainable platform that will enable Iraqis in the arts, the young in particular, to benefit from and participate in international events.

Concurrent with its ongoing support of local projects, Ruya's focus rests on creating a network of intercultural events by which it can contribute to the development of civil society in Iraq and continue to nurture a multicultural dialogue through the arts. Ruya's unique network of artists includes those working both within Iraq and outside of it, spanning all disciplines in the visual, performing and literary arts. This network provides an incomparable overview of Iraq's contemporary culture and allows cultural organisations to view and engage with this culture through the foundation. Collaborating worldwide, Ruya works with institutions to create regular and meaningful opportunities for Iraqi artists, including residencies and exhibitions. Ruya was the commissioner for the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 56th Venice Biennale and appointed Philippe Van Cauteren, the Artistic Director of S.M.A.K., to curate the Pavilion.

[www.ruyafoundation.org](http://www.ruyafoundation.org)

### **About Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development**

Based on the principle that culture is a basic need, the Prince Claus Fund's mission is to actively seek cultural collaborations founded on equality and trust, with partners of excellence, in spaces where resources and opportunities for cultural expression, creative production and research are limited and cultural heritage is threatened.

The Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development is based in Amsterdam and is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dutch Postcode Lottery.

[www.princeclausfund.org](http://www.princeclausfund.org)