“I wish it had been a dream” – Syrians long for the 10-year nightmare to end

OCHA and Silkroad amplify the voices of people in Syria after a decade of conflict

(New York, 15 March 2021) Today marks a decade of conflict in Syria. A conflict that has killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of civilians, forced millions from their homes, and impoverished the country.

To honour the enduring yet fragile resilience of the people of Syria, Yo-Yo Ma’s non-profit organization, Silkroad, and the United Nations today released “I wish it had been a dream”: Voices from Syria. The four-minute “soundscape” mixes 100 self-recorded messages from people inside Syria with music from renowned Syrian clarinetist and Silkroad artist Kinan Azmeh.

The title reflects the sentiment of 100 children, women and men who spoke from every Governorate in Syria, saying that they long for the nightmare of conflict to end. They reflect on profoundly difficult times but also on everyday moments of pride and joy and their hopes for a future without conflict.

Widows who escaped the horrors of ISIS describe camp life with their children; youths who fled besiegement share how they persevered to finish their education; displaced families express a longing to go home and rebuild their communities. “We thought this would only last for a few days,” one woman says. A child adds: “I hope that we will return to our homes and live a more beautiful life.”

“This unique piece uses musical and visual storytelling to further carry the personal stories and pain of the people of Syria,” said Malene Jensen, Chief of the Strategic Communications Branch of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). “Their voices serve as a stark reminder to the world that the people of Syria must not be forgotten.”

The music track is based on Sad Morning Every Morning, composed by Azmeh—a native of Damascus, Syria—one year into the crisis. “I have always believed that the Syrian story can only be told by the collective stories of millions of Syrians,” he said. “I am happy to be part of this United Nations campaign in collaboration with Silkroad, bringing the voices of Syrians to the forefront, voices that have been sidelined for too long. While this piece of music might not end the suffering, it might bring some hope for a just future.”

Azmeh is a member of the Silkroad Ensemble, which joins musicians from all over the world. As a social-impact arts organization working to connect cultures across borders, Silkroad partnered with UNOCHA to facilitate the campaign’s musical components and distribution.

Silkroad’s Artist Director, Rhiannon Giddens, said: “We recognize the importance of this moment. Through the universal language of music, we strive to lift their voices and carry their stories to all corners of the globe. This partnership touches the very fabric of our mission—to create music that leads to a more hopeful and inclusive world. It is our honour to support the United Nations and Kinan Azmeh in this critical effort.”

Accompanying the music is a video that weaves animation with curated photography from the 10-year archives of 16 Syrian photographers, most of whom are still in Syria. Their personally selected
images and hand-written captions provide a unique portrayal of the crisis and an inside look into the lives of Syrians during 10 years of conflict.

“I wish it had been a dream”: Voices from Syria draws public attention to the plight of the 13.4 million people inside Syria who face an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Its launch is timed to remind Governments to commit significant resources to life-saving efforts in the country ahead of the UN Secretary-General’s global pledging event for Syria on 30 March.

Weblink: https://unocha.exposure.co/voicesfromsyria

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About UNOCHA: Our mission is to coordinate the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises. We advocate for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all. www.unocha.org

About Silkroad: Yo-Yo Ma conceived Silkroad in 1998, recognizing the historical Silk Road as a model for radical cultural collaboration—for the exchange of ideas, tradition and innovation across borders. In an innovative experiment, he brought together musicians from the lands of the Silk Road to co-create a musical language founded in difference, thus creating the foundation of Silkroad: both a touring ensemble comprised of world-class musicians from all over the globe and a social-impact organization working to make a positive impact across borders through the arts. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad leads social-impact initiatives and educational programming alongside the creation of new music by the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble. www.silkroad.org

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