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GENESIS AT THE CROSSROADS

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Dear Esteemed Members of both the United Nations and the Committee for the United Nations' 2015 Sustainable Development Goals:

We go beyond mere invitation to implore you to include art and culture as an integral component of the United Nations' 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. In so doing, the United Nations will literally and metaphorically mount a global loud speaker, permanently affixed to its vast multi-lateral stage to create a resounding call to action that further supports, empowers, and deservedly honors the role arts and culture play in binding together our human family, mortally wounded and deeply fractured by conflict and war.

**Voice**

As a universal language, Art enshrines the human spirit – it intones the human heartbeat of our time as well as our past. As both the reflection and the mirror, Art acts as the lens through which we can explore, examine, question ourselves, explain historic events, and face transgressions both as victim and perpetrator, to ultimately embrace our humanity. The repository of our individual and collective memory, Art's myriad forms of expression, allow us to provide testimony and bear witness. The arts form a multi-faceted scaffold for our imagination and one on which we can re-imagine, process and provoke. Art emboldens us as human beings and helps us both make and leave our indelible mark across generations for Art's sake and for the sake of all humanity.

**Healing**

A vital portal for human self-expression, Art serves as our mortal oxygen for physical well-being and mental health. At times, the elixir which dulls and the salve which soothes our pain, the arts inoculate us and our brethren from further trauma. The balm for tragic and seemingly insurmountable suffering, the arts and artistic expression help us find our resolve and reclaim our resilience, without which we might, and could otherwise, implode. As an outlet for anger and fear, the arts loosen the shackles and chokehold of penetrating distress. As spectator and/or practitioner, the arts actively enable us to find release for such inner devastation and give us access to compassion and forgiveness. One could say, as the antidote to conflict, Art is, and always will be, the best violence-prevention program for the world in which any of us could invest.

**Instrument for Good**

Art provides the meandering path along which we allow ourselves to wander, wonder and discover. Along and through this artistic journey, Art allows us space to tap into our personal well of creativity – thereby acting as the medium to mindfully innovate and envision our future.

With precious few bridges to connect our common humanity, Art can serve as the vehicle for collaboration across divides. In the human ache to expand our capacities, Art exemplifies and engages the inner desire for growth and development, transformational change and social good.

**Economic Engine**

We have a great deal of data to support the notion that communities thrive wherein there are vibrant artistic programs. Investing in the arts can preserve precious heritage while creating economic opportunity for teaching, scholarship and the production of artistic product for varied markets. Art can create compelling reasons to build and expand community in ways that mutually serve varied and often competing interests, or to utterly transform marginalized communities into resourceful, sustainable ones.

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*Syria Speaks*, a new anthology showcasing Syrian artistic expression which shares their peoples' plight in the midst of ISIS and Al Qaeda-brand extremism, (not to mention, government-sanctioned terrorism,) speaks for itself. One could say the very same of films released from Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring… all the way to the present-day documentaries from Tunisia, Bahrain and beyond. *Drama for Life*, along with other theater production companies that emerged in South Africa during the truth and reconciliation commission and its aftermath, continue to tell us a story and enroll us in an altered paradigm for transparency and forgiveness. *Cambodian Living Arts*, among its many triumphs, breaks the perpetual cycle of violence, providing opportunities for master-artist survivors of the disturbingly abusive Khmer Rouge regime to teach and transmit their culture to former child soldiers. Some organizations, especially those focused on literary arts and documentary film, shed light on the hideously pervasive and unrelenting industry of sex trafficking.

Look no further than the thriving American enterprise, founded over half a century ago, *10,000 Villages,* which engages more than 120 artisan groups, (many living below the poverty line,) in over 35 countries and cultivates long-term buying relationships with access to developed markets to sell their wares. Combined, the more than 100 American and Canadian retail outfits of this engine surpassed 25.5 million (USD) in sales a few years ago. It is in equal measure, a women's empowerment program which teaches business skills experientially and enables women to provide for themselves and their families, thereby restoring dignity. *The Sacred Music Festival* in Essaouira, Morocco utterly transformed the local economy and scaled tourism to new heights.

These artistic endeavors take shape in large organizations with chapters around the world to smaller ones, who cannot afford to employ staff… ranging all the way to the unsung heroes who individually volunteer their time on weekends or evenings, in between the notes.

Museums, artistic works and artists, as well as sacred places for art and culture, all too often become the targets of terrorism, because, by its very nature, Art embodies and shares our deepest human selves and defines and preserves community, paying homage to our heritage. Artistic and cultural institutions and other artistically/culturally sacred places are often severely damaged and purposely destroyed in conflict and war, so that those who dominate can attempt to erase the identity of the oppressed. It is abundantly clear that terrorists and other hateful individuals understand the inherent and precious value of art and culture to preserve and share who we are as people.

When we globally align to explicitly embrace art and culture as invaluable, defend its existence and take great measures to advocate for and economically ensure its presence and further expansion, we not only honor the plurality of human expression, but also preserve our rich human tapestry and its enduring legacy that will inevitably guide us in the present and inform our future.

Let us not squander this rare historic opportunity to locate ourselves in and through our individual aesthetic expression to inextricably bind us to our collective humanity. Time is of the essence…

Let us, hereby, sign on to a part of the United Nation's 2015 Sustainable Development Goals to:

- Preserve and protect existing art, artistic institutions and cultural heritage sites
- Provide protections, safety, ease of travel and exchange for artists and related practitioners
- Economically support the development of new works in all artistic disciplines through a global fund/endowment
- Economically support safe havens and place-making for shared artistic exhibition of all forms through a global fund/endowment
- Defend and advocate for the presence of art programs in schools and allocate abundant funding resources commensurate with their importance
- Create economic incentives for communities to take on artistic initiatives in global peacebuilding

Most respectfully, it is a privilege and an honor to put this document before you for your consideration and timely adoption,

Wendy Sternberg, MD

Founder and Executive Director

Genesis at the Crossroads

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