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For immediate release:

Euphrates Institute 2015 Visionary of the Year Speaking Tour

Redding, CA – August 19, 2015. This September, Ms. Zuhail Sultan, founder of the National Youth Orchestra of Iraq (NYOI), will be traveling across the United States on a Euphrates Institute speaking tour. Ms. Sultan founded the NYOI in 2009 at just seventeen years of age, and is the recipient of the Euphrates Institute’s 2015 Visionary of the Year award. Her presentation, entitled “Uniting Iraq’s Youth through Music”, will focus on how she formed an orchestra of over 40 young musicians from across the country—Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, Christian—and on the unifying and peaceful impact the group had on its participants.

The NYOI has performed to sold-out audiences throughout Europe and traveled abroad each year since 2011 to partner with other groups and hold workshops. The barrier-crossing connections that the orchestra has fostered have “kept me going”, says Ms. Sultan, especially in the past periods as she’s watched the country under siege from ISIS militants. “I remembered all the results I have witnessed first-hand with the orchestra—how I have seen Sunni, Shia, Kurds, Christians all playing together in harmony...they see how much they have in common as young people, and as young Iraqis.”

Not a mainstream move for anyone in their society, the young women in particular face the risk of criticism and other threats since playing an instrument—especially one of the classical (Western) variety—has been deemed un-Islamic by extremists. Yet they have defied the danger to take lessons, receive coaching, play chamber music, and to perform as an orchestra.

The Euphrates Institute, the educational non-profit that is coordinating Ms. Sultan’s tour, organizes travel study programs, extensive online resources, and selects an annual visionary all in support of the vision of a world at peace, beginning with the Middle East. The Visionary of the Year award recognizes one person doing extraordinary work at a grassroots level, striving to ‘make the idealistic realistic and the impossible possible’. Euphrates is happy this year to honor Zuhail Sultan, and to share her message with a wide U.S. audience. The speaking tour begins in New York and ends in San Francisco, spanning 17 days. Visit euphrates.org to learn more.

“To us, Zuhail is an example of the counter to terrorism. The Islamic State is recruiting young people to sow violence and conflict, whereas Ms. Sultan is bringing young people together to promote harmony, unity, and peace,” says Janessa Gans Wilder, CEO and Founder of the Euphrates Institute. “Zuhail’s work is the embodiment of standing up for hope and saying no to fear. Her accomplishments in Iraq demonstrate the power of work at a grassroots level. “

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