

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

Launching ceremony of MISHKAL Arts Festival

EU funded project entitled “MISHKAL- Youth Festival for all Arts”

AL MEDINA THEATRE, HAMRA
17 September 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The representative of the Minister of Culture Gaby Layyoun
Mrs Nidal Al Ashkar,
Distinguished artists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me here tonight to celebrate with all of you the launching of the "MISHKAL Festival: A Youth Festival For all Arts".

This festival invites all participants to open their hearts, eyes and minds to different forms of expressions and impressions. This festival brings young people together, brings out their spirits of excitement, creativity, freedom, the yolo feeling (*you only live once*), the need for expression and space but also the need to be heard and understood by the older generations. This festival is the continuation of the positive spirit of unity we saw in the country during the past weekend and the antidote of the recent outbreaks of violence we have seen flaring up again in the region. This is a festival of hope and joy, it is a festival we are all proud to be part of.

Dear friends,

The European Union works with all its partner countries, including Lebanon, to support genuinely local artistic productions, festivals and events ranging from theatre, audio-visual arts, graffiti, choir productions and much more.

We like to think we bring European culture closer to the Lebanese people, through our long established “European Film Festival”, which is going to take place again towards the end of November this year. Through our regional activities, the European Union also fosters interregional artistic exchange.

The European Union, the 27 Member States and the six European cultural institutes active in Lebanon, fully support the development of the arts. The arts are an important medium and powerful tool for intercultural dialogue, bringing individuals and peoples closer together. Access, preservation and appreciation of cultural heritage are key to mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue, and ultimately, development and peace. For their part, *creative industries* contribute to economic growth and raising people out of poverty.

Art is not only "arts for arts sake". Its aesthetic dimension can easily migrate into political spheres. It is in this sense that artists often are responsible "agents of change" and that the arts can ignite, but also help prevent conflicts and facilitate a process of reconciliation and peace. Art is indispensable and in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings we will all join hands to create, deepen or preserve the freedom and space needed for full expression.

Freedom of speech and expression is not a given everywhere in the world. Let us not forget the censorship, repression, detention and violence against artists that reach us almost on a daily basis. Let us not forget the many artists from this region who have paid with their health and sometimes with their life for seeking to live out this precious value.

Please join me in thanking Al Medina Theatre, the inspiring work of Mrs. Nidal al Ashkar and all other artists, cultural actors, institutions in Lebanon, for bringing us together this evening and the rest of the week.

Enjoy the action and use the inspiration!

Thank you