

2017 04 04 Media Release: Special Event at Uni of Sydney: Wed 5 April, 5-9pm

Syrian Refugee Activists & Artists Speak Out

FORUM: 5-7pm, Woolley Common Room

FILMS: 7.15-9pm. Woolley N395

www.facebook.com/events/1837866319812089/

The newly-formed Syria Solidarity Initiative and Department of Arabic Language and Cultures are proud to co-host this special event marking six years since the start of the Syrian uprising, the brutal repression of which has led to more than 400,000 deaths, and has forced millions of people to flee their homes.

Lucia Sobera, Senior Lecturer at Sydney Uni's Department of Arabic Language and Cultures, said: "The public discussion about the Syrian crisis is dominated by two mainstream narratives: the first one focuses on a geopolitical factors, the other one puts sectarianism at the centre. Both these narratives underestimate structural, especially economic, factors and, most importantly, they silence the multiple voices of Syrian democratic activists that, six years on the beginning of the uprising, find themselves caught between the violence of the Assad regime, that of the jihadist groups and the neglect of the international community. The Department of Arabic Language and Cultures is co-hosting this Forum to contribute to a discussion that goes beyond simplistic narratives, giving voice to the Syrian artists and democratic activists who were forced to flee their country. We also want to offer a space where refugees are seen as a valuable resource to the Australian community, not as a burden. This Forum is part of our research, teaching, and public outreach commitment to enhance Australian students' and the public's understanding of the Arab world, its cultural productions and its resilient civil society."

Maher Jamous, a film-maker & producer who fled Darayya west of Damascus in 2012 and came to Australia as a refugee in March 2015, added: "As artists, we can challenge the mainstream portrayal of Syrian as a binary conflict between the Assad dictatorship and reactionary Islamist groups like ISIS and Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham (formerly Jabhat Al-Nusra). My films can show the world the long history of Syrian opposition to the regime, and give a voice to the many Syrians who continue to sacrifice everything for the original aims of the revolution: the ousting of the regime, democracy, & social justice."

Miream Salameh, a visual artist forced to flee her beloved Homs who also volunteers with newly arrived refugees in Melbourne, said: "My artworks address issues of freedom, social justice and the suffering of people being crucified for loving life and liberty. I aim to give a voice to all the oppressed and voiceless people".

Hisham Jansis, whose family also fled Homs, last year topped Arabic Extension in his HSC. He's now in first year of a Nursing/Science degree, and recently formed a group to support newly arrived refugees: "Since I arrived in Sydney three years ago, I am grateful for the all the opportunities I've had. However, it causes me great pain to see people in my country still dying from daily bombs, or fleeing their homes. As a developed nation, Australia should increase the number of refugees it takes, stop detaining them. It should also stop joining with the US in its military interventions in the region".

These four speakers will be joined by Enrico De Angelis, media analyst at Free Press Unlimited (Netherlands) & co-founder of Syria Untold (via Skype).

There will be time for some discussion, followed by two films:

* Faraway... So Close To The Homeland (produced by Maher Jamous)

* Painting Syria (Artist portrait of Miream Salameh, by Rebecca Rütten)

There will also be a sizable contingent of Syrian refugees at Sydney Palm Sunday protest against Australia's policies of offshore detention and temporary protection, starting 2pm Hyde Park North, marching to Circular Quay. www.facebook.com/events/1790212824567225/

For more information, or to interview any of the speakers, contact Lucia Sobera (0411471475), Maher Jamous (0470584578), or Mark Goudkamp (0422078376).

Posted by: Ian Rintoul <rintoulian10@gmail.com>