



American  
Friends  
Service  
Committee

# The power of cultural organizing in the MENA region

## A dialogue and exchange for artists and activists

**WELCOME** to Casablanca and our event, *The power of cultural organizing in the MENA region: A dialogue and exchange for artists and activists*.

There are significant barriers that make meeting in person difficult. You know many of these aspects including restrictions on visas; the coronavirus pandemic; costs and difficulty for travel; our personal and family obligations; and other bureaucratic challenges. As artists and activists, we also face our own real fears and the risks that we take as we find different ways to engage our communities in important interventions related to justice, equality, and human rights. These are some of the many reasons why we thank you for spending these five days with us.

Thank you for your courage, vision, and commitment.

This event, part of our global dialogue and exchange program, is made possible in part by the generosity of *Brot für die Welt*, a foundation based in Berlin, Germany. We also want to give thanks to our advisory board member Moukhtar Kocache for his wise guidance and counsel throughout this process, and our special consultants, cultural organizer Abdelsamee Abdallah and lead researcher Jude Sajdi. We are grateful for their contributions.

—**BILAL, ELENA, JASON, KHALED, RUBA, SAFWAT, SAIF, SAMANTA** (*AFSC staff*)

## **OUR PROGRAM**

The arts and creativity have a special and important role in bringing people together, moving hearts and minds, and helping populations, especially young people, develop positive identities and methods of self-expression. Likewise, cultural organizing can play a pivotal role in crossing the colonial-imposed borders in MENA. Participants will discuss ways to support networks of artists, find strategies to connect artists and activists authentically, and share case studies of innovative organizing that demonstrates the efficacy of arts and culture work connected to social justice and human rights.

The week includes panel discussions, artistic presentations, cultural visits, and interactive sessions. We welcome you to engage deeply with us as we know that there is enormous insight and wisdom in the space we will create together. Our program this week is a “design experiment.” Committing to participatory and inclusive facilitation, we encourage you to let us know throughout the week if there are ways in which we can improve upon our time together.

## **ABOUT THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE**

Founded in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems.

## **AFSC IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

AFSC has been present in the Middle East since 1949 and has worked on supporting refugee communities in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. It has contributed to peacebuilding efforts in the region, focusing on vulnerable communities, emergency response, and youth civic engagement. Recent humanitarian support focused on the COVID-19 emergency response, the Beirut blast response, and ongoing efforts for children and elders in Gaza. AFSC has also supported migrant and refugee minorities by developing advocacy and research, and partners closely with our colleagues in the United States on changing US policy towards Palestine. Current initiatives also focus on countering fragmentation in Palestinian communities around the world.

## **PARTNER IN MOROCCO**

SENICAR is our local partner in Morocco. It is an international non-profit association working to integrate culture in public policies for human, social and economic development. The association was born from the common will of African, European and international cultural actors, convinced that culture is common to all countries. And that cultural action can provide solutions to peace, sustainable development, and cultural diversity problems. Cultural actors meet to provide tools for diagnostic and decision-making, for advocacy to strengthen freedom of creation, for the professionalization of cultural actors in the world, and for joint work and exchanges between professionals from all countries.

## VENUE

Sofitel Hotel & Resort in  
Casablanca  
Rue Sidi Belyout - 2000  
phone +212 522 456 211

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

If we booked your flight or you have shared your travel information with us, we have arranged to pick you up at the airport in Casablanca. Questions to Samanta at [scovic@afsc.org](mailto:scovic@afsc.org).

## EXPLORING CASABLANCA

We will plan to have some dinners outside of the hotel, and on Tuesday we will travel by bus to visit various artistic and cultural sites in Casablanca with our partner Senicar.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Your health and wellness are very important to us. We also will be creating space to discuss how to stay grounded and inspired in the context of the many challenges we face. If at any point you feel sick, unwell, or need assistance, please contact Samanta Covic, Safwat Shibly, or a member of staff.

Morocco requires you to be vaccinated for COVID. Morocco also may require you to have a negative COVID test in order to enter the country. We advise you to check the requirement two days before travel as the situation and regulations could easily change.

It is AFSC policy that you wear a mask during the event to ensure your health and the health of others is protected.

On Wednesday, we will help arrange for COVID testing at the hotel to help ease your travel back home since it is a requirement in many countries to test prior to entry.

## CONTACTS AND WHATSAPP GROUP

We will create a WhatsApp group so participants can stay in touch during the program. Please make sure that Samanta has your phone number when you arrive at the hotel.

For local contacts in Morocco and in the case of emergency:

- Rajaa Essaghyry +33 61 2 33 73 60
- Rajae Hammadi +212 645-850454
- Aadel Essaadani +212 619-771977
- Safwat Shibly +962 7 9239 1678
- Bilal Oleimat +962 7 9512 5236

For other questions related to hotel, transportation, or logistics:  
Samanta Drucker, [scovic@afsc.org](mailto:scovic@afsc.org) (MENA participants)  
Jason P. Drucker, [jdrucker@afsc.org](mailto:jdrucker@afsc.org) (US/EU participants)

## SOCIAL MEDIA, PHOTOGRAPH, AND MEDIA

Safety and security are extremely important to us. For this reason, we ask that you refrain from posting about the event on social media. **Please do not tag the hotel, location, or the names of participants at our event during the course of our time together.** Please only post *after* the event has ended, and only post the photographs of participants with their explicit permission. Thank you.

We will be joined by a number of researchers and writers who are developing case studies and stories about various activities and our discussion topics. They will not develop any content without your explicit permission. Any recordings or photographs will be used only with your permission. There is no media present.

# The Program

**Saturday, June 18**

**WELCOME**

**15:00**                      **Welcome Desk and Hotel Check-In**

You are welcome to check in to the hotel any time after 15:00 in the afternoon. AFSC staff will be in the lobby to welcome and assist you.

**19:00 – 22:00**                      **Welcome Reception and Dinner**

Please join us in in the Sofitel for an informal welcome reception. Remarks by Khaled Elkhouz, AFSC Regional Director for Middle East, and Sa'ed Atshan, AFSC board member.

**Sunday, June 19**

**DAY ONE**

**8:00 – 10:00**                      **Breakfast**

**10:00 – 11:30**                      **Welcome and Morning Circle**

Moukhtar Kocache helps introduce the overall themes and topics for this week's dialogue and exchange program. AFSC colleagues will share the agenda and host an interactive session for participants to meet each other.

**11:30 – 11:45**                      **[BREAK]**

**11:45 – 12:45**                      **Day One Focus: The Environment in MENA Today**

**Moderator:** Abdelsamee Abdallah

**Panel Presentation:** Ahmed Saleh, Talal Afifi, Nelly Aboud, Ahmed Guerfal

A decade after the Arab Spring brought hope for transformative change, the conflicts, economic pressures, and repressive forces that inspired these people-powered actions have endured, worsened, or been replaced by dynamics that are often no less harmful. Moreover, the recent coronavirus pandemic not only disrupted lives, communities, and businesses around the world, but it also had a deep impact on the artistic and cultural ecosystem. At the same time, the crisis further revealed the importance of arts and culture for people as a major resource for resilience, connection, and mental wellness, all of which give people hope that a better future is possible. Today's focus will be on how artists work in the context of the many restrictions and barriers from society (government, civic, legal, cultural, etc.) that challenge artists and cultural practitioners from engaging fully in social change efforts.

**Sunday, June 19**  
**DAY ONE (CONTINUED)**

**12:45 – 14:00**

**Power Analysis**

We will host an interactive session focused on analyzing the powers that influence the space of artists and organizations to present their work, along with strategies for influencing these powers. We will discuss alternatives that can be used to empower the sector.

**14:00 – 15:00**

**Lunch at Sofitel**

**15:00 – 15:45**

**Group Presentations**

Groups will share their insights from the power analysis session.

**15:45 – 16:00**

**[BREAK]**

**16:00 – 18:00**

**Case Study: A Conversation with Staff from Senicar**

Staff from our partner organization, Senicar, will share their story about restrictions in the arts and cultural sector in Morocco. Following this presentation, participants will brainstorm various ideas for overcoming challenges and discuss their own local and country-level situations. We will end with a closing circle.

**18:00 – 19:00**

**[BREAK]**

**19:00 - 21:00**

**Dinner**

**MONDAY, June 20**

**DAY TWO**

**8:00 – 10:00**

**Breakfast**

**10:00 – 10:30**

**Morning Circle**

Moukhtar Kocache, along with AFSC staff, helps introduce the overall themes and topics for today's conversations. We also will summarize key findings from the prior day.

**10:30 – 12:00**

**Day Two Focus: Artists Inspired to Make Change**

**Moderator:** Jude Sajdi

**Panel Presentation:** Amani Abouzaid, Lalla Kaber, Elias Ayoub, Nesrine Daly, Rami Younis, Emily Jacir

Today we will focus on the myriad of ways that artists are socially engaged. Through storytelling and case studies, participants will share the ways in which the arts and cultural sector can meaningfully play a role in social transformation. How are visual artists, writers, filmmakers, choreographers, performing artists, musicians and others explicitly seeking to create social change through artistic forms and interventions? What impact can various forms of community arts, social practice, public art, and performance play in society?

**12:00 – 12:15**

**[BREAK]**

**12:15 – 14:00**

**Group Activities: Decision Line and World Café**

We will host an interactive session focused on what artists and cultural practitioners need from various groups to enable their work.

**14:00 – 15:00**

**Lunch**

**15:00 – 16:30**

**Arts and Civic Space**

This session will focus on how we can intentionally work as artists and activists to authentically create civic space in environments that are inherently difficult and sometimes dangerous for women, LGBT, marginalized communities, and other ethnic and religious minorities. What are the openings that we can take? What potential is there to shape and change our context? Participants will share stories of how they have developed artistic and cultural interventions that empower individuals and communities.

**16:30 – 16:45**

**[BREAK]**

**MONDAY, June 20**  
**DAY TWO (CONTINUED)**

**16:45 – 18:00**

**Open Space and Closing Circle**

AFSC staff will facilitate opportunities for participants to self-organize around the most pressing and interesting topics that they would like to discuss. There will be additional time set aside on Wednesday afternoon to keep these conversations going.

**18:00 – 19:00**

**[BREAK]**

**19:00 – 20:00**

**Dinner at Sofitel**

**20:00 – 21:30**

**Arts Showcase: Telling Our Stories**

Our participants come from a rich diversity of artistic and cultural traditions. Tonight, some of our guests share short presentations about their work, inspiration, and unique perspectives. In this way, we develop collective understanding and appreciation of those in our community. Please join us for networking and conversation to follow.

**Host:** Saif Atari

**Presentations:** Mohammad Abou Aziz, Mosab Sahnoun, Kholoud Issa, Hamed Sinno

**TUESDAY, June 21**  
**DAY THREE**

**8:00 – 9:00**

**Breakfast**

**9:00 - 9:30**

**Meet at lobby**

Please meet promptly in the Sofitel Lobby so we can depart on time for our day's cultural excursion.

**9:30 – 10:00**

**Day Three Focus: Cultural Excursion, Community Voices and Stories**

We will spend our day in conversation with artists and culture-makers in Casablanca. In partnership with Senicar, our local partner in Morocco, participants will have a dialogue and exchange with Moroccan artists and cultural organizers. What is unique about the role that community arts, social practices, and other aesthetic forms in Morocco play in activism and advocacy?

**TUESDAY, June 21**  
**DAY THREE (CONTINUED)**

**10:00 – 12:00**                      **EAC-L’Boulvart (Artistic and Cultural Education)**

This organization is a non-profit association that campaigns for the promotion and development of contemporary music and urban culture in Morocco. Since 1999, it has been organizing activities around the discovery and support of the young alternative scene, through concerts, training, workshops, meetings and L’Boulevard Festival of urban music. In 2010, the association created the Boultek, the first center for contemporary music in Morocco. We will visit the staff to learn about the mission and activities, and see the music recording and rehearsal studios.

**12:30 - 14:30**                      **Lunch at La Ola by Aux Crevettes Restaurant**

**15:00 - 17:00**                      **Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen Cultural Center**

The Etoiles de Sidi Moumen Cultural Center in Casablanca was created on the initiative of the Ali Zaoua Foundation. It is a space dedicated to training young people from the neighborhood in the performing arts, based on learning foreign languages and the rules of artistic dissemination. To this end, the center offers various activities such as meetings, debates, events, and other shows.

**17:00 - 19:00**                      **[BREAK]**

**19:00 – 20:00**                      **Dinner at Sofitel**

**20:00 – 21:30**                      **Arts Showcase: Telling Our Stories**

Our participants come from a rich diversity of artistic and cultural traditions. Tonight, some of our guests share short presentations about their work, inspiration, and unique perspectives. In this way, we develop collective understanding and appreciation of those in our community. Please join us for networking and conversation to follow.

**Host:** Saif Atari

**Presentations:** Hamdi Jouini, Omar Sharabati, Lalla Kaber, Zeina Daccash



**WEDNESDAY, June 22**

**DAY FOUR**

**8:00 – 10:00**

**Breakfast**

**10:00 – 10:30**

**Morning Circle**

Jason Drucker, along with AFSC staff, helps introduce the overall themes and topics for today's conversations. Alia Lahlou will reintroduce how we create a sense of well-being as we locate ourselves in our work. We also will summarize key findings from the prior day.

**10:30 – 12:00**

**Day Four Focus: Thinking about the Horizon: Supporting Our Vision**

**Moderator:** Moukhtar Kocache

**Panel Presentation:** Hatem Salama, Tatiana Mouarbes, Michelle Coffey, Fyras Mawazini

Artists and culture makers as well as their organizations, face many obstacles toward sustaining their work over a long horizon, but there are many examples of important ventures that have longevity and impact and new approaches to resource mobilization that help ensure greater independence. In this session, we will hear from seasoned philanthropy colleagues and discuss the various forms of resourcing and innovation that can build sustainability with artistic integrity, including new trends that may also encourage work that is at the nexus of arts and culture, social justice, and human rights. What are the promises and limitations of alternatives such as crowdfunding, community philanthropy, income generation, cross-sectorial partnerships, solidarity-shared economies and impact investments to name a few on the future of our work?

**12:00 – 12:15**

**[BREAK]**

**12:15 – 13:15**

**Case Study: Building Cultural Power and Scaling Artist-Led Activist Organizations and Activities for Impact**

Following our morning conversation, we will take inspiration from Oakland, California-based artist and activist, Favianna Rodriguez, who has successfully created multiple artist-led organizations. We will use this session to begin a discussion about whether some of the concepts about arts, culture, and social change in the United States are relevant for a MENA-context.

**WEDNESDAY, June 22**  
**DAY FOUR (CONTINUED)**

**13:15 – 14:00**

**Open Space starts**

AFSC staff will facilitate opportunities for participants to self-organize around the most pressing and interesting topics that they would like to discuss. We invite various groups to meet over lunch and then to continue their conversations after lunch.

**14:00 – 15:00**

**Lunch**

**15:00 – 16:30**

**Open Space Continues**

**16:45 – 17:30**

**Final Research Discussion**

As our time together comes to a close, we will ask participants to reflect on our theory of change. Why do we believe that art and culture are related to social transformation? What new insights have we made about the role of artists and cultural organizers, specifically in the MENA region? How do we understand the impact or value of our social change interventions? What advice can we provide to our researcher about fruitful topics for further exploration. Jude Sajdi and Moukhtar Kocache will facilitate the conversation.

**17:30 – 18:00**

**Closing Circle**

Please bring your thoughts and reflections as we come together to share our collective intentions for the future.

**18:00 – 19:00**

**[BREAK]**

**19:00 – 21:00**

**Closing Dinner**

**THURSDAY, June 23**  
**DAY FIVE**

**8:00 – 10:00**

**Breakfast and Closing**

Breakfast is open for those who have not already departed on flights home or to a next destination. For those that have not yet departed, we invite you to continue your networking and socializing. Please let us know how we can assist you in your travel plans.

# Participants

## **EGYPT**

Ahmed Saleh  
Kholoud Essa  
Amani Abuzaid  
Hatem Salama

## **PALESTINE**

Sabreen Abdulrahman  
Rami Younis  
Emily Jacir  
Omar Sharabati  
Sa'ed Atshan

## **MOROCCO**

Maha al Bukhari  
Sofia Fahli  
Naima Zitan  
Khalil Nemmaoui  
Alia Lahlou  
Fyras Mawazini

## **TUNISIA**

Nesrine Sahly Daly  
Hamdi Jouini  
Ahmed Guerfal

## **LEBANON**

Hamed Sinno  
Areej Abou Harb  
Elias Ayoub  
Zaina Dakdash  
Jafar Tuffar  
Nelly Abboud

## **JORDAN**

Muhammad AbouAziz  
Jumana Mustafa  
Emad Hajjaj  
Safi Sakran

## **SUDAN**

Talal Afifi  
Mosab Sahnoun

## **MAURITANIA**

Lalla Kaber

## **UNITED STATES**

Michelle Coffey  
Favianna Rodriguez  
Tatiana Mouarbes

## **SENICAR STAFF (MOROCCO)**

Zineb Nejjam  
Adel Essaadani  
Essaghyry Rajaa  
Rajae Hammadi

## **AFSC PARTNERS AND CONSULTANTS**

Moukhtar Kocache (Lebanon)  
Abdelsamee Abdallah (Egypt)  
Jude Sajdi (Jordan)  
Marisa Katz (United States)  
Robert Bound (United Kingdom)

## **AFSC STAFF**

Khaled Elkhouz (Jordan)  
Jason P. Drucker (United States)  
Bilal Olimat (Jordan)  
Saif Atari (Jordan)  
Elena Haro (Jordan)  
Samanta Covic (Jordan)  
Marianne Elias (United States)  
Jennifer Bing (United States)  
Safwat Shilby (Jordan)  
Ruba Ja'afra (Palestine)