

Dear Friends and colleagues,

This newsletter will be of an exceptional length, due to last minute news we wanted to share with you, since it is directly related to our mission. We ask you thus to read it carefully and entirely.

Indeed, it is with great consternation and sadness that we just received distressing news: we (Art in All of Us) have just received the refusal of visiting a private school in Damascus, Syria. As you know, we are now in the Middle East. As you know, our project aims at visiting schools throughout the 191 countries recognized by the United Nations. And, as you also know, there are some countries in the Middle East that just can't reach to get on well. However, among the goals we have set for Art In All of Us, and we expose to the children we meet, is the promotion of the artistic and cultural exchanges among all the children of the world. We also wish to show them the similarities that the human share, regardless of their nationality, skin colour, or political views.

Why have we chosen to promote these exchanges among the children? Simply because we are convinced that if the kids of today learn to know each other better, and discuss with each other as from an early age, then, adults of tomorrow will be more tolerant, open-minded, or at least better informed. We do wish to help the children of today to be responsible and conscious adults of tomorrow.

We had an appointment with a private school in Damascus. We had previously met the director, to explain our project, mission etc... (a meeting that had been –or at least we thought so- very positive). Since we didn't know how to get to the school, we had made an appointment in front of our hotel, early in the morning. Unfortunately, after having waited for an hour on the sidewalk, nobody had come to pick us up! ... we learned a few hours later, by the phone and through another person, that we couldn't visit the school because the director refused to participate or involve its school in a project or a book involving also Israel! And we insist on the fact that we are talking about a private upper class school, and that the meeting we had held with the director the day before ended with her approval, and that we had arranged an appointment to visit the school on the day after!

It is with sadness that we note that the education of our children is sometimes placed under the responsibility of persons of extremist opinions, who don't give a chance to teach open-mindedness!

It is with great disappointment that we realize we won't meet these children, and won't be able to give them an opportunity to see the world through different eyes, and know their close as well as further neighbours through different words and images (neutral ones).

However, this extremist and authoritative decision reinforces us in our mission, and confirms that there are still so many things to do, to try to change today's world, and bring a bit of this tolerance, open-mindedness, and greater conscience that we are sometimes lacking. This lack unfortunately can lead us to such negative and regressive decisions.

However, we refuse ourselves to leave Syria on a negative impression, and would rather think that this is an isolated case we have been confronted to. And we do hope that our visit to other pupils in another school (public one), has brought some interest in other countries and cultures, as different from Syria as they can be, under all points of view.

Having now closed this long but important parenthesis, we can resume the usual course of our newsletter, and present you the final news and facts of our trip in West Africa, as well as the latest news and updates on our website.

Our fourth newsletter comes along with the end of our visit in West Africa covering 17 countries. Each of them was different and similar at the same time. They all keep their traditions and believes, but have the same dreams and aspirations. Through art activities in about 30 schools and children centres, we tried to give their children the opportunity to express themselves, something that is really missing in too many schools throughout the region.

Today, we are building a network of schools for a new Pen Pal project where children from different continents will be able to correspond about specific issues. We hope that this new PPP

(Paintings, Photos, Poetry) Pal Project will contribute to promote cultural exchanges between people, which is the mission of Art in All of Us. Please feel free to join us if you are interested.

Today, we are happy also to announce you some news on the website:

-Mali Art Gallery:

<http://www.artinallofus.org/countries/africa/Mali/maliphoto1.htm>

-Our new "what they told us" section where the children expressed themselves through simple statements:

<http://www.artinallofus.org/whattheytoldus.htm>

-Some poetry translated in Spanish and French (sorry we still need some hands for helping in other languages):

<http://www.artinallofus.org/countries/africa/Caboverde/Caboverde%20poetry1.htm>

<http://www.artinallofus.org/countries/africa/Guinea%20Bissau/Guinebissau%20poetry1.htm>

As usual, some other hard figures from our trip in West Africa :

-We have travelled over 22.683 km in 110 days covering 17 countries (and we have reached our 75<sup>th</sup> country).

-We spent 792 hours in transport (33 full days), of which 97% of it was by road.

-We hitchhiked over 945 km, took a motorcycle over 146 km and even travelled by ox-cart when no car was available. We eventually got used to the overcrowded minibus or local bush taxis we shared with hundreds of people over 15.434 km.

-And yes... we did it again.... we have beaten our record for the most painful travel from the border of Cameroon and Central African Republic to its capital Bangui. We did 625 km in 36 hours and passed through 56 police checkpoints.... Each one of them was painfully corrupted, but we eventually got through thanks to our fellow angel.

-we took 19.812 photos in West Africa

-Our latest favourite statement comes from an 11 years old boy in a rural area in Upper Egypt: "I want the world to know that in rural areas we have hidden talents, that need to be developed, but today, we don't have the means of doing so",

-We have been invited by the Sultan of Pouss in Cameroon. Keep posted for some amazing pictures in couple of weeks in the Cameroon Gallery.

-We are both in excellent health and condition, and are still on the right track even after an arrest by the Jordanian security forces and being forced to spend a couple of hours with them in the hidden basement.

We are now in the Middle East and will be heading shortly towards Asia, to visit the following countries. Any contact in those countries or people that might be able to lodge us will be of great help:

Pakistan

Nepal

Bhutan

Bangladesh

Laos

Vietnam

Burma

Japan

Korea

Singapore

Brunei

We are also proud to announce you also that Art in All of Us has been elected by Tides Centre ([www.tides.org](http://www.tides.org)) to be part of their program. It will open us new fundraising opportunities and will enable us to share the kids' art work globally.

Greetings from Damascus,

Anthony and Stephanie