

# DAMANAT

**ABOUT IMAGINATION AND FOLLOWERS**

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**Imagination Friends for Puppet Stage and Shadow Play**

## **An Overview: Imagination Friends for Puppet Stage and Shadow Play Initiative:**

Imagination Friends for Puppet Stage and Shadow Play Initiative is one of the initiatives recently established, but it has a distinctive impression in its specialization as it believes and seeks to have a community that shares in development, believes in peace, respects humanity, and protect main freedoms. The initiative aims at reinforcing the involvement of theatre, particularly, puppets stage and shadow play in discussing public issues especially those concerning youth and children. It also seeks to increase and encourage their participation in public issues and how to address the ones related to them through the stage. It also did its best to increase the knowledge of modern theatrical experiences and schools, especially those related to the field of puppet stage and shadow play. Furthermore, it performed many volunteering scenes for the purpose of raising the awareness of peace and tolerance including activities performed in cooperation with Yemeni NGOs. The last project, in partnership with German Fredrich Ebert, was about a puppets stage's shows for peace and the role of youth in development and peace building to the young of both sexes.

### **Youth Initiatives in Yemen**

A number of youth initiatives have appeared in Yemen which in turn meet parts of the community's needs.

Especially in winter, a lot of these initiatives provided clothes and blankets.

The initiatives also worked in the field of humanitarian assistance and relief based on the number of their members of youth since getting a membership in a youth initiative is easier than in foundations and non- governmental organizations.

In the cultural field, initiatives have performed cultural activities, some of which are superior in quality to the cultural work made by non-governmental organizations depending on volunteering of youth groups and thus increasing their ability to launch effective, good and unique cultural activities in cinema, theater, puppet theater, Shadow Play, Public Theatre, festivals of International Children, Women and The International Environment Days, as well as the National holidays.

As part of their desire to networking, the initiatives have worked within activities and events performed by Yemeni non-governmental organizations or some international organizations wishing to invest the energies of youth of these initiatives to carry out their various activities.

Historically, government institutions have taken control of cultural and social work. By virtue of with the establishment of political pluralism, non-governmental organizations have begun working in Yemen community. However, due to the inability of organizations to absorb more young people, cultural initiatives have begun to emerge as free initiatives

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that do not require licensing and have flexibility in work being not restricted by organizational rules and regulations. The international and local community as well as the press has recognized this influence made by youth initiatives in

the Yemeni community and how these initiatives fit the state gap.

According to an article by Hamdan Al-Ali on Al-Arab Al-Jadeed website, he talked about the youth initiatives and the state gap: "**In light of the suffering resulting from this gap, some community organizations try to assist in order to alleviate the community suffering with simple potentials and traditional measures.**"

This influence has emerged when rubbish was accumulated in Yemen because cleaning workers made a strike. Therefore, the role of youth in this aspect has become clear and evident through the disposal of waste and the distribution of cleaning materials. As a result, this has somewhat alleviated the risk of fever in Taiz, for example, as well as the activity of these initiatives in large numbers in the promotion of hygiene, taking into consideration how to control the outbreak of cholera, dengue fever and malaria. Indeed, this promotion was often made with a cultural character.

### **Culture and Youth Initiatives**

There are a large number of youth initiatives that are active now in Yemen and their role is clear. However, when focusing on youth initiatives within culture, arts and literature it is something different. Youth initiatives have

often been directed towards local NGOs and international organizations with the view that humanitarian relief related to food, health appliances, medicines, tents in addition other topics and tools are considered to be part of the human concept while forgetting the important role of culture, arts and literature in the humanitarian process. Even though the role of culture, arts and literature in health, psychological and social support as well as psychotherapy through these tools, very few initiatives that have specialized in the cultural aspect and its role in the humanitarian process.

This is often due to the fact that humanitarian work does not require licenses for cultural, artistic and literary activities, or the request to submit cinematic, theater, folkloric or lyrical texts to be read to be approved or not. Consequently, there has been an evasion of youth initiatives of these activities otherwise working in areas that do not need permits, readings and modifications. By the way, giving a wheat bag will not change the community thinking as it seems drama will do. Thus, the plays must be monitored and modified to be acceptable to the authorities, society and to the initiative's self-censorship or the creator himself within or outside the initiative.

This does not mean that the initiatives have not been engaged in the cultural, artistic and literary fields. However, in general, as it is the case of local and international organizations, there has been a relative disregard and lack

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of attention to its importance and the entry of these three areas within a sensitive area based on the individual, the initiative, the local organization, the international organization and the government.

The availability of a policy to freedom of expression will bring to the community many youth initiatives that will work in pure cultural field or cultural aspect to be considered as an input to the humanitarian process. There will be no fear of interruption or risk due to the sensitivity of the community, society and the state.

### **The Experiment of Imagination Friends for Puppets Stage and Shadow Play**

Based on its cultural tendency, the Initiative had a variety of pure culture experiments without a title framing the work whether it was humanitarian, cultural or concerning rights. Among these works are the following:

- Partnership works with Ibhara Foundation for Childhood and Creativity and with Bader Foundation for Development promoting issues relating to the values of peace and tolerance through puppets stage and shadow plays.
  - The Initiative's subordinate partnership with international organizations such as Care and Friedrich Elbert to show puppets stage and shadow play in a number of host organizations and those which sponsor and take care of children to promote peace values and to assure the right of education to children.
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- Inter-schools activities as a type of promotion for schools or to reinforce a cultural or ethical value within activities of those public or private schools.

**Overview: Experiment of Imagination Friends with Freedom of Expression:**

Each event of Puppet Theater and Shadow Play requires a theatrical text as the starting point for the work. Under a policy that serves the freedom of expression, these texts do not need to pass to many parties to be modified and approved. Implicitly, the writer must be sensitive to social, political and religious issues of society and the state. His sensitivity (i.e. writer) is increased during a conflict or war.

However, even with the presence of this sensitivity, there have been great modifications to the texts. Among other things there are a number of modifications that do not occur due to the poor text of the theater, but because of the ideas presented. Because of the general atmosphere in Yemen, these modifications are subject to:

- The writer's modifications being a part of self-censorship that s/he got used to.
  - Initiative's adjustments as appropriate to its idea or specialization or work or the work title it does and the case it serves, as well as deleting or modifying some of the texts fear of the political and social situation.
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- The donating organization's modification which does not wish to raise the society or the government against it because of its desire to continue to work in Yemeni society.
- The official modification which often made by specialized authorities such as Ministry of Culture in case the cultural, artistic or literary activities were performed in a school under its care.

It is a long series of procedures which provoke fear to engage in cultural, artistic or literary and engage only in the purest humanitarian work or training.

These subsequent measures may result in decreasing the Initiative's works or other Initiatives' works in the cultural aspect.

### **Establishing a Policy of Freedom of Expression and the Future**

Whether in the time of war or the desired peace period, the existence of a policy on freedom of expression is so important that not only youth initiatives but also individual activists, non-governmental or international organizations can work in a more active way and have a more positive influence in the society.

The existence of a policy on freedom of expression with this number of youth initiatives and making the cultural work reachable and applicable - will encourage the existence of a big number of cultural, artistic, and literary events. This will lead to a better participation and involvement of youth in the public concerns and make

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positive change towards the issues of peace, tolerance, human rights and public freedoms.

Bureaucracy used towards culture will only lead to the fear of cultural work and ignorance then tends to focus on other issues which necessitate the repetition of the work without future effects. The sack of wheat may save the human life, but at the end the play is what makes the human.

### **Summary**

Cultural work is as important as humanitarian work. It must be given more freedom when dealing with and not fear or put obstacles against cultural, literary and artistic production. Modern studies proved the role culture, arts and literature in the humanitarian work and accordingly, so there is no necessity to deal with the culture by such kind of modifying or charging. Each text calls for peace and tolerance is a good text. We also see the necessity to have a policy to freedom expression in Yemen.

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