



## **EXILE VOICES**

### **Exile Seen through the Eyes of Young Refugee Camp Reporters**

*Over the last three decades, Reza has borne witness to the harsh realities of exile. He tries in his own way to heal its invisible scars, particularly those of children and youths. As a response to the enforced idleness of the camps, he seeks to teach them a universal language – the language of images, to enable them to become the camp’s own reporters, actors in their own realities, the better to share them with the rest of the world.*

*In December 2013, Reza made his first trip to the Syrian refugee camp of Kawergosk, in Iraqi Kurdistan. He established a photography workshop for the camp’s children between the ages of ten to fifteen years. An age when curiosity is at its peak, and when the visual purity of a new life is a story that can be told each day.*

### **The Exile and Uprooting of Children**

Maya Rostam is twelve years old. She likes to laugh and play with her friends. She has lots of dreams – there was no limit to life’s possibilities. Then came the fateful day, August 17, 2013, when she was forced to leave her native Syria because of the upheavals of war. Maya and her family found refuge at the Kawergosk refugee camp, located a few kilometers from Erbil, along with thousands of other families reduced to a precarious life of subsistence, possessed only of what they could manage to carry away as they fled.

“A refugee has lost everything except hope.” Today, Maya and her family have managed to make it to Turkey and a chance to put down new roots and possibly begin a new life.

Deliar, Solav, Maryam, Zeraf ... Like Maya, seventeen children joined the photography workshop at the Kawergosk camp to learn to bear witness to their daily lives. Armed with cameras furnished by Reza, they learned about the impact of images, and creating a tangible proof of their lives to show the world. Not so much about the techniques of photography, but rather about how to look at the world through the lens of a camera and reveal one's vision to others. As Maya confided to Reza, "I want to learn photography because I think that it is a way to help the world see what I feel, what we are going through."

### **The Kawergosk Photography Workshop or the Breath of a New Life**

Since then, two years have gone by. The children of Kawergosk are creating their own history thanks to photography. Supervised by Mohammad Qaddri, a Syrian refugee journalist trained by Reza, they continue to photograph their life in the camp. Some of their images, shown on the banks of the Seine in the summer of 2015 as part of the exhibition *A Dream of Humanity* conceived by Reza, touched the entire world. They revealed another perspective of the refugee camps and exile: that of childhoods where innocence, lucidity and wounds but also hope have their place. As they pursue their training, their undeniable talent and technical progress have shed light on a reality of whose complexity we often are unaware.

In October 2015, Reza has established a new workshop for young Yazidis in Iraqi Kurdistan: ten girls and ten boys aged seventeen to twenty, who will also become witnesses to their own lives. A viewpoint which will help them to develop resiliency.

A third visual training session is launched in Suleymanieh.