Athens, March 21st 2016

**Open Letter**

**To the Artists and Intellectuals of the World**

I am speaking from Greece. Where more and more refugees become entrapped. Because some European states have closed their borders. Refusing to ensure refugees even safe passage to where they are accepted and where they can live.

I am speaking from Greece of the crisis. Where its inhabitants, victims of extreme austerity, are unemployed, poor, battered, living a difficult present and facing an uncertain future. Within a European Union which is going through a second major crisis. This time political. Perhaps existential.

Yet the inhabitants of Greece, the victims of extreme austerity, expend all efforts to succor refugees and immigrants. The victims of war and of extreme indigence. Today's damned of the Earth. Succor in all ways they can. With unbounded generosity. Often out of what they themselves are lacking. Because Greeks have been refugees and know about refugees. Because on this soil respect for the foreigner has been an ethical command since time immemorial. Obeyed always with open heart. Because Greece remains the land of hospitality. "Put another plate on the table" we have been singing and continue to sing in our tavernas.

The soul of Greece is and always has been its culture. You, artists and intellectuals of the world, know this well. You know it because you study its heritage which is also your heritage. You know it because you exercise your art, as it finds itself in permanent tension with this heritage. In all its forms. You know it because you have touched in many ways the present expressions of this culture.

Closed borders oblige Greece to lift at these times the burden of the world. The burden resulting from wars and from extreme indigence of which Greece bears no responsibility. Yet Greece assumes the responsibility to lift this burden. Willingly. Obeying the command from time immemorial. Showing and at the same time fashioning its present moral character. And saving the honor of the world.

But Greece is small. And the burden it lifts presents some cruelly material qualities. Which Greece --its people and its state-- cannot bear alone.

It is for this reason that I am addressing myself to you. To you, artists and intellectuals of the world. To you who know well that man or woman cannot live by bread alone. To you who know well that, even in extreme indigence, even in facing death, man or woman will hum a tune, will draw a sketch, will dance some steps, will remember or will create a line of poetry.

I am addressing myself to you, artists and intellectuals of the world, who can convey and propagate this knowledge everywhere. To stir and rouse conscience everywhere. With the myriad ways your creative power will invent. Urging that the burden of the world belongs to the world. As does its honor.

I am addressing myself to you, artists and intellectuals of the world, who with your creations and your reflections give form every moment to the conscience of the world. Give form to that immaterial something which assures the memory of humanity and the continuation of its history.

Many of you have already taken action. Many of you have already spoken up. But our --and yours-- Kiki Dimoula urges us all: "*Speak up. Say something, anything. Just don't stand there as a steely absence*". And our -- and yours-- George Seferis reminds us all: "*Life is what you have given*".-

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