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For immediate release

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Headline International Performances Cancelled But Festival Continues Despite U.S. Instigated Visa Crisis

San Francisco May 20, 2019: It is with regret that the San Francisco International Arts Festival (SFIAC) must announce that the Syrian theatre company [Collective Ma'louba](#) and the Canadian dance ensemble [Compagnie Virginie Brunelle](#) will not be making their respective U.S. debuts as part of this year's Festival program as originally planned. Both companies were refused work visas without a legitimate reason. The denials are symptomatic of a system that is now being deliberately used to try to further isolate the United States from cultural contacts with peoples from around the world.

Festival Director, Andrew Wood said, "Virginie and Ma'louba are the obvious victims in this instance, but nearly every other international artist travelling to San Francisco for the Festival has been subjected to unwarranted delays, questions and stress by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to the point where several others almost did not make it either."

One of the causes of the crisis is recent changes in practice by USCIS to issue Requests for Evidence (RFEs) for nearly every petition—regardless of the spurious nature of the questions asked. Needless RFEs coupled with the new practice of denying charitable organizations expedited handling of cases has, in effect, severely impacted SFIAC's ability to navigate the system for securing visas and quadrupled the time and resources in filing and completing each case.

Further, SFIAC is not an isolated case. This has become an industry-wide crisis.

Ironically the only Festival artist that was seemingly able to avoid this in 2019 was Collective Ma'louba. The SFIAC petition on their behalf was the first one approved (and without an RFE). But the apparent purpose in allowing the application was to have the members of the company travel to US Consulates only to be denied and humiliated in person.

Wood continued, "There is no acceptable reason for this treatment. It is indicative of the malign spite and poison that defines the occupant of the White House leaching down into the operational level of government to metastasize as policy."

In response SFIAC is [putting together a panel of experts on non-immigrant visa issues](#) to take place on Saturday June 1 at 2:00pm (during a time originally scheduled for an event featuring members of Collective Ma'louba). The organization will also be asking audience members to sign up to get involved in actions to counter the Trump Administration's artist work visa policies.

The cancellation of Collective Ma'louba and Compagnie Virginie Brunelle has caused the Festival to bring the performance by the [Spitfire Company](#) from the Czech Republic forward by an hour to 8:30pm from 9:30pm on Thursday May 30.

Audience members who have purchased tickets for performances by Collective Ma'louba and Virginie Brunelle will be offered reimbursements by the Fort Mason Center box office.

Members of the media who were planning to review the Thursday May 30 performance by Collective Ma'louba for their respective publications will be contacted to discuss alternate arrangements / program assignments for the evening.