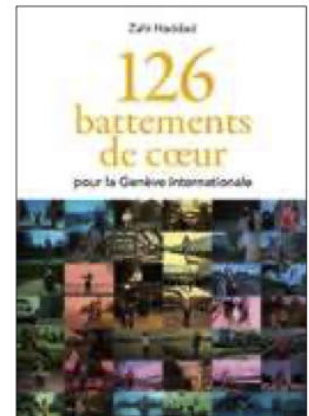


# Publishing in a pandemic

# 126 heartbeats

# for International Geneva

*In this year of UN75, let us not forget the Organization's forerunner, the very first nongovernmental organization, the League of Nations. Geneva author Zahi Haddad celebrates the centenary of the League's first meeting with a book that highlights the continuing importance of diversity and dialogue in the city in which it was founded.*



**SARAH JORDAN, UNOG**

We hear more and more about International Geneva these days; it is a term that has become mainstream. At newSpecial, formerly *UN Special*, it has been the focus of our attention for decades. Our section “International Geneva”, under the successive editors-in-chief of our inter-agency staff magazine, has covered its many facets and acknowledged multiculturalism as being the beating heart of this city.

At the end of September, Le Temps published an article on 15 under-40s from international organizations, NGOs or academia who “make International Geneva”. It was an interesting and informative article, presenting the profiles of six men and nine women who are doing great work here in Geneva and will certainly continue to do so. But International Geneva is not just about the young and thriving. It's a bigger

melting pot than that and there are parallel paths that serve the greater good.

When I heard about a book called “126 Heartbeats for International Geneva”, I had to find out more. Published on 24 November by Zahi Haddad to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first meeting in Geneva of the League of Nations on 15 November 1920, it couldn't be a more fitting celebration of what makes Geneva such a meaningful place in which to live and work, irrespective of one's age, education or origin. Multiculturalism in Geneva was Zahi's departure point – not at the United Nations, where you would expect it – but in civil society. He tracked down 126 of the 185 or so nationalities registered by the Office Cantonal de la Statistique (OCSTAT) as living in Geneva. Those missing either declined the invitation or only have very few nationals in

Geneva. But for those who were willing, Zahi interviewed them and told their stories.

The profiles range in age from 15 to 83. Women and men from 126 different countries, identified by their names and the nationality they represent. In common, their passion for a project – be it economic, humanitarian, cultural, artistic, scientific or environmental. These people embody the values of human rights and peace that we all adhere to and showcase Geneva as a city that welcomes difference and offers opportunities. Some came specifically to Geneva because it was the only place from which they could launch their project and all 126 of them are ambassadors for Geneva the world over, flying the flag for a city in which everything is possible, and, in particular, change through dialogue. This resonates with what those of us working inside the United Nations are

doing, but these 126 stories are about the self-employed, about entrepreneurs and about migrants from war zones. These are people who have had to invent or re-invent themselves. They are not diplomats or civil servants although, for many, their journeys inevitably led to fruitful exchanges with the international public sector. With Covid-19, some of us are worried about growing precarity. For many of the profiles in this book, precarity is a way of life.

When Zahi started working on this project 18 months ago, he knew precisely what he wanted to do. An expatriate himself (he arrived in Geneva from Lebanon at the age of three), he had already published a book based on his family's experience of emigration in 2014 (*Au bonheur de Yaya*, Editions Tamyras). Active in the world of journalism, publications and international relations, including for the City of Geneva for



almost 10 years, Zahi secured sponsors for his project including the Canton and City of Geneva, the Loterie romande, Genève tourisme and the Göhner Foundation as well as institutional patrons. He found the perfect publisher, Slatkine, a reference in Geneva for illustrated books, founded, symbolically, just two years before the League of Nations, in 1918. The next step was to find the stories he wanted to tell. Alongside his other professional activities and in the context of the world pandemic and all the complications it has represented since March, Zahi found his heartbeats, interviewed them and then told their stories. For each profile, presented across two pages, a date and place of birth, a sector of activity, the name of their project and a short phrase saying what International Geneva means to them. Then 600 words to develop each story and a portrait signed by Zahi's

photographer Aurélien Bergot in graphic synergy in some way with the story told.

Paradoxically, what transpires from these stories, are both diversity and universality as well as a determination to change the world we all live in for the better. Presented in the alphabetical order of first names, the book has a preface by Geneva State Councillor, Pierre Maudet, and a postface by Maria Isabelle Weiser, Swiss-French Director of the foraus think tank – and one of the 15 under-40s featured in the *le Temps* article mentioned above.

Zahi had hoped to organize a party on the publication of his book this November. He had imagined it as a celebration of multiculturalism, to which some of the individuals featured in the book would contribute their art, music or gastronomy. The pandemic, unfortunately, has put paid to this idea... for

the moment at least. Zahi, like many of the people described in his book, is clearly not one to give up. His book, conceived as a commemoration of the League of Nations is a league of nations in itself, like the city of Geneva. To read it is already a celebration of what all of us in International Geneva hold dear. "126 Heartbeats for International Geneva" is published in French and in English by Editions Slatkine. ■

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**Further details:**

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