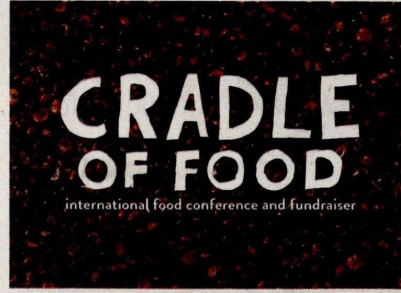


## Food unites, sharing sustains!



Today is a big day to remember the devastating earthquakes that rattled southeast Türkiye and northern Syria in February. It has been more than four months since the disaster, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands and displaced millions in 12 cities and rural countryside in Türkiye alone and affected areas in northern Syria. When such a calamity happens, everybody rushes to help at the first wave of shock, but as time passes, aid and assistance tend to decline.

There is nothing like being forgotten while still desperate to build a new life. In such moments a new kick is needed. With this thought, a new initiative has been launched to restart funds coming in to give long-term support to the region.

Today in London, a unique one-day conference and fundraiser event is being organized at the historic Old Billingsgate building, London's former Fish Market, by Turkish food writer Cemre Torun and award-winning chef Mehmet Gürs. The event titled "Cradle of Food," aims to draw attention to the food culture of the area and create a channel to raise funds to help the producers and especially women's cooperatives in the disaster struck area.

The day-long event will feature a series of inspiring talks and discussions in two sessions in the morning and afternoon, focusing on the culinary and agrarian heritage of the region.

The highlight of the day will be a massive "Collaboration Lunch" featuring the region's heritage dishes, prepared by leading chefs and food writers from the region and beyond. Eight long tables will be set up to share the dishes prepared and presented by the contributing chefs and participants. Food will be shared, uniting all who want to sustain the aid, and hopefully, the message will reach out to the ones who wish to help: the donation channel will be open for three months through the U.K.-registered Türkiye Mozaik Foundation and the local humanitarian organization Hayata Destek / Support to Life association.

These tables will be staffed by local and international chefs who know the cuisine of the region and the participants who will assist them. The meals will focus on traditional dishes that everyone cooks at home, with support from Gaziantep-based Filiz Hösükoglu and Antakya-born chef Maksut Akşar who has lost close relatives in the disaster. Needless to say, the city of Antakya, famed for its exquisite food culture, will be the focus of the event. It has been one of the cities most affected by the earthquake, as most of the city was wiped out.

Another Antakya native Sandra Sinem Kaya, studying gastronomy in Barcelona, is among those who have lost cousins, close relatives and friends in the disaster, and Yaren Çarpar, also from Antakya, will be helping in the kitchen, as she has from day one helping at the zone building an aid kitchen.

There are world-renowned names among the chefs leading the groups. Among the prominent Turkish chefs in the U.K. and Ireland, Ahmet Dele, who received two Michelin stars in Ireland, and Kemal Demiral, who is gaining a reputation in

London with his newly opened The Counter, are also contributing.

Chef Mohammad Orfali from Dubai, who recently ranked first in the MENA 50 Best list, also did not refrain from extending his support. Chef Mehmet Akdağ from Antalya 7 Mehmet restaurant, who recently received the first prize of the Gourmand Awards Best Restaurant Book with co-author Sinan Hamamsarlar, will also be in the kitchen.

Apparently, food will be great with the hands of all those chefs, but souls will be nourished by the inspiring talks where a group of international speakers will take the stage in the conference section.

Most of them are old friends who have been to Türkiye many times and know the cuisine of the region very well.

Ana Sortun will be contributing both as a speaker and chef of the famed Boston restaurant Oleana. She knows the food culture in Türkiye very well and brings countless food enthusiasts to Türkiye every year with the Oldways group.

Ansel Mullins, one of the founders of Culinary Backstreets, will discuss the theme of hospitality; rightly so as he must be the one aware of the hospitality factor in Türkiye as CB was first launched in Istanbul.

Another inspiring talk will be given by Kamal Mouzawak, who created exemplary projects in Lebanon with Tawlat, the restaurant he established with Syrian immigrants, and Souk El Tayeb, where he brought together local producers, and he will be sharing his experiences to serve as a model for the support to the earthquake zone.

One of the most exciting speakers for me was Carolyn Steel, author of "Hungry City," an architect with a very different perspective on food and known for her work on urban food supply chains.

Steel, who I have had the opportunity to listen to several times before, not only draws attention to the importance of maintaining urban-rural connections and the challenges of feeding cities but also sees food as the most powerful tool we have to think and act together to change the world for the better, arguing that by reconfiguring our relationship with food, we can find new and better ways of living that will stop the damage we are doing to ourselves and the world.

The event aims to do just that. All proceeds and donations will be used to support women's producer cooperatives, small-scale local producers and farmers in the earthquake zone, so it will not only be the cities but also the rural countryside that feed the cities that will be receiving the aid. Food is a universal means of communication. Food unites, and communal tables build bridges between cultures.

As chef Maksut Akşar says, "We can only keep our culinary culture and traditions alive by sharing them!" So true... Food unites, and sharing sustains. Only by sharing we can multiply and with the power of solidarity we can carry our cultural heritage into the future. Difficult times can be overcome with the unifying power of food!

aylinoneytan@yahoo.com