



19th Annual Human Rights Watch International Film Festival *Festival to Screen 32 Films from 20 Countries, June 13-26 at Walter Reade Theatre*

(New York, May 14, 2008) – Each year countless talented filmmakers work against long odds, short finances and threatening politics to bring to the screen powerful stories of human struggle, sacrifice, and triumph. The **Human Rights Watch International Film Festival** (<http://www.hrw.org/iff>) returns to the Walter Reade Theater this June to bring some of the most compelling of these stories to New York audiences.

Co-presented by Human Rights Watch and the Film Society of Lincoln Center, the 19th annual festival will run from June 13-26, featuring 19 feature-length films and 13 shorts from 20 countries, including 31 New York premieres. The festival is especially proud that this year's program features an unprecedented 20 films by women.

The festival launches on Friday, June 13 with *A Promise to the Dead: The Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman*, with the film's namesake and renowned author of "Death and the Maiden," Ariel Dorfman, present to introduce this extraordinary documentary. In 1973, the coup in Chile sent Dorfman into exile and killed many of his friends. Director Peter Raymont follows him on an emotional journey back to Chile as he recalls that tumultuous period and its consequences. Dorfman will receive a special spotlight later in the festival when two films that he wrote with his son Rodrigo, *Prisoners in Time* (1995) and *Dead Line* (1998), will be featured. *A Promise to the Dead* will be followed opening night by *To See If I'm Smiling*, in which six young Israeli women talk with bracing candor about their experiences during their mandatory military service in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Director and former Israel Defense Forces soldier Tamar Yarom will present the film.

Women are also on the frontlines in festival centerpiece *The Sari Soldiers*, by New York-based filmmaker Julie Bridgham, this year's recipient of the festival's **Nestor Almendros Award** for courage and commitment in filmmaking. The film follows six Nepali women on opposing sides of Nepal's armed conflict as they bravely fight to transform their country's future.

On Thursday, June 26, two closing night films offer sobering tales of the profound personal cost many pay in the fight for justice. *Letter to Anna* tells the story of the life and tragic death of crusading Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered

in 2006 by a gunman who some believe was an operative of the government of which she was openly critical. In *USA vs. Al-Arian*, the US government is implicated in an intimate portrait of Palestinian-American activist Dr. Sami Al-Arian and his family during his federal trial on terrorism-related charges.

One of the most shameful legacies of America's past is invoked in *Traces of the Trade*, in which director Katrina Browne and nine relatives trace their roots as the largest slave-trading family in American history. Exactly 200 years after the United States outlawed the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the film offers powerful new perspectives on the black/white divide.

Four more superb documentaries by American women will be showcased at this year's festival. Acclaimed cinematographer Ellen Kuras' gorgeously shot *The Betrayal (Nerakhoon)*, co-directed by Thavisouk Phrasavath, movingly chronicles 23 years in the life of a Laotian family who escaped the ravages of the Vietnam War to resettle in New York. From Senain Kheshgi and Geeta V. Patel comes the world premiere of *Project Kashmir*, in which the directors, two American friends from opposite sides of the divide, investigate the war in Kashmir and find their friendship tested over deeply rooted religious biases they never had to face in the United States. Edet Belberg's *The Recruiter* takes a compelling look at army recruitment in this country through the story of Louisiana Sgt. Clay Usie, one of the most successful recruiters in the history of the Army. In the Sundance award-winning *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo*, filmmaker Lisa F. Jackson documents the tragic plight of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo who are raped in the name of war.

Africa is also the focus of *The Dictator Hunter* which follows tireless Human Rights Watch lawyer Reed Brody and Chadian political refugee Souleymane Guengueng as they pursue former president Hissène Habré of Chad, under whose regime tens of thousands of citizens were tortured and killed. "If you kill one person, you go to jail. If you kill 40 people, they put you in an insane asylum," says Brody, who will attend the festival screenings. "But if you kill 40,000 people, you get a comfortable exile with a bank account in another country, and that's what we want to change here."

Films from Latin America and the Middle East have become a staple of the program, and this year is no exception. Like *A Promise to the Dead*, the Chilean film *Calle Santa Fe* returns to the brutal Pinochet regime and post-revolutionary exile through filmmaker Carmen Castillo's deeply personal journey back to her homeland, which she fled in 1974 after her husband, a leftist leader, was killed. From Brazil comes Maria Ramos' *Behave*, which follows the processing of minors who have fallen into the hands of Rio de Janeiro's troubled juvenile court system and detention centers. Middle Eastern offerings include the feature drama *Under the Bombs*, a poignant tale of a Lebanese woman's search for her young son in the aftermath of the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon in 2006, and *This Way Up*, where a group of elderly Palestinians learns to live with the everyday changes, restrictions, and surprises created when the West Bank Wall is erected just yards from their door. Playing in the same program as *This Way Up*, *Open Heart* highlights the

plight of the Palestinian healthcare system struggling under occupation, while the short *Deadly Playground* (preceding the Israeli film *To See If I'm Smiling*) looks at a young boy's fascination with cluster bombs dropped by Israeli forces in south Lebanon in 2006.

Other highlights of this year's program include Roger Weisberg's *Critical Condition*, which reveals the impact of being sick and uninsured in this country; *American Outrage*, a portrait of two elderly Shoshone sisters who've been fighting against the US government's attempts to take over their land in Nevada (showing with the Kenyan land-rights short *Rightful Place*); and *China's Stolen Children*, an investigation into how China's one-child policy has led to a boom in stolen children, with an estimated 70,000 children kidnapped there every year and traded on the black market. The spotlight is also on China in the annual Human Rights Watch photography exhibit in the Film Society's Frieda and Roy Furman Gallery, adjacent to the Walter Reade Theater, in which photographer Kadir van Lohuizen shows the world a side of Beijing that Olympic organizers would prefer to conceal.

In partnership with the Adobe Foundation, the festival is pleased to announce the inaugural edition of *Youth Producing Change*, a special program of nine short films directed and produced by youth from across the globe. Armed with digital cameras and their own boundless creativity, these young people bravely expose human rights issues faced by themselves and their communities. Many of the teenage filmmakers will be making the trip to New York to present their work.

Each year, Human Rights Watch endorses select First Run Feature films that fit within the Human Rights Watch mission. This year they have added a new dimension to the partnership by screening five of the **HRW Selects Film Series** as part of the festival proper – Monday, June 16 to Friday, June 20, daily at 4:00 p.m. Please check www.filmlinc.com or www.hrw.org/iff for descriptions of the films.

Single screening tickets for the 2008 **Human Rights Watch International Film Festival** are \$11 for adults, \$7 for Film Society members and students with a valid photo ID, and \$8 for seniors. They are available at both the Walter Reade Theater box office and online at www.filmlinc.com. The HRWIFF08 Series Pass (\$40 public/\$30 Film Society member) admits one person to five titles in the festival, and is available only at the Walter Reade Theater box office (cash only). Additional information is available online at www.filmlinc.com and www.hrw.org/iff/, or by calling +1-212-875-5600.

Please note: Due to construction work taking place around Lincoln Center, access to the Walter Reade Theater is at 165 West 65th Street, close to Amsterdam Avenue. Once there, take the escalator, elevator, or stairs to the upper level.

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