

Press Release

Thursday May 1st 2008

ISRAELIS DENY OFFICIAL CANNES FESTIVAL FILMMAKER ENTRY  
TO PALESTINE

Officially selected for the 2008 Cannes Film Festival which will take place next month, Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir has been denied entry to Palestine at the Jordanian border. She was on her way home for the world premiere of her new film, "Salt of this Sea" which is the first feature film by a Palestinian female director. She was held at the border for six hours, repeatedly questioned, her telephone taken from her, and then denied entry. Two agents from the Israeli Ministry of Interior escorted Annemarie from the terminal and placed her on a bus back to Jordan.

Israel continues to deny hundreds of people entry to Palestine, including outstanding filmmakers like Jacir, entry to Palestine with complete impunity. Annemarie, who is from the West Bank, has not been allowed into Palestine for nine months, which meant the some of the final scenes of her film could not be shot in Palestine and had to be filmed at an alternate location with the cooperation of the French in Marseille.

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For more information please contact:

Keith Hammond - Scottish Committee for the Universities  
of Palestine [scot.cam.ac.boycot@googlemail.com](mailto:scot.cam.ac.boycot@googlemail.com)

Campaign for the Right of Entry/Re-Entry to the  
Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)  
(A Grassroots Campaign for the Protection of Foreign  
Passport Holders Residing in and/or visiting the  
occupied Palestinian territory)

Email: [info@righttoenter.ps](mailto:info@righttoenter.ps)

Website: [www.righttoenter.ps](http://www.righttoenter.ps)

m) +970.(0)59.817.3953

f) +970.2.295.4903

Annmarie Jacir annemariejacir@yahoo.com

PRESS RELEASE

The Palestinian film, Salt of this Sea ("milh hadha al bahr"), directed by Annemarie Jacir and starring Suheir Hammad and Saleh Bakri, has been accepted as an "Official Selection" of the Cannes Film Festival 2008.

The Cannes Film Festival takes place in May 2008, which is also the 60th anniversary of the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Salt of this Sea, the first feature film by a Palestinian female director, follows the story of third generation refugees in search of freedom and is a commemoration of the ongoing Nakba.

In May 1948, Israel was declared a "Jewish state" despite the fact that the majority of the indigenous population consisted of Palestinian Arabs, Christians and Muslim. Zionist leader David Ben Gurion instituted "Plan Dalet" in order to change the demographic make-up of historic Palestine and secure physical control over the territory. What followed is the expulsion and dispossession of 780,000 Palestinians from their homes and land (75% of the population). More than 530 Palestinian villages were depopulated and/or completely destroyed. And the world's largest and longest-standing refugee population was created.

Before Cannes, the film will have its world premiere in Amari Refugee camp in Ramallah with the presence of the film director Annemarie Jacir and main cast.

Milh Hadha al-Bahr (Salt of this Sea)  
Palestine 2008  
Directed by Annemarie Jacir  
Produced by JBA Production  
1'43" min.

## Salt of this Sea synopsis

Soraya, born in Brooklyn in a working class community of Palestinian refugees, discovers that her grandfather's savings were frozen in a bank account in Jaffa when he was exiled in 1948. Determined to reclaim what is hers, she fulfills her life-long dream of "returning" to Palestine. She meets a young man whose ambition, contrary to her, is to leave forever and find a life far away. Tired of the constraints that dictate their lives, they know that in order to be free, they must take things into their own hands, even if it's against the law.

## ANNEMARIE JACIR BIOGRAPHY

Award-winning Palestinian filmmaker and writer Annemarie Jacir has been working in independent cinema since 1994 and has written, directed and produced a number of award-winning films. She was named one of Filmmaker magazine's **25 New Faces of Independent Cinema**. Her short film, *like twenty impossibles* was the first Palestinian short film to be an official selection of the Cannes International Film Festival (Cinefondation), went on to be a **Student Academy Awards Finalist**, and won 15 awards at International festivals including Best Film at the **Palm Springs Short Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, Institute Du Monde Arabe Biennale, Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival**, and IFP/New York.

She is a recipient of a **Jerome Foundation Media Arts** grant, a **New York State Council on the Arts** distribution grant, the **Paul Robeson Fund**, and is winner of the **Kathryn Parlan Screenwriting Award** as well as a **Zaki Gordan Award for Excellence in Screenwriting**. Her feature script "Salt of this Sea" was selected for the **Hubert Bals Development Fund**, the **Sundance Screenwriters Lab** in Utah, and was a Sopadin finalist for the **Grande Prix du Meilleur Scenariste**.

She is chief curator and co-founder of the groundbreaking **Dreams of a Nation** Palestinian cinema

project. She has taught courses at Columbia University, Bethlehem University, and Birzeit University and also works as a freelance editor and cinematographer as well as film curator. She organized Palestine's first major traveling film festival in 2004, screening films across the country. Jacir is a board member of Alwan for the Arts, a cultural organization devoted to North African and Middle Eastern art. She has served as a jury member to the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival as well as Cinecolor Award, Argentina. She is a founding member of the Palestinian Filmmakers' Collective, based in Palestine.

Jacir lives in Palestine. *Salt of this Sea*, Palestine's first feature film by a female director, follows the story of a working-class, Palestinian-American refugee returning home. It is Jacir's first feature length film.

#### **Awards & Distinctions**

- *25 New Faces of Independent Cinema, 2004* - Filmmaker Magazine
- *Best Films of the Year* list, 2003 - Film Comment Magazine
- Recipient of Jerome Foundation Media Arts Grant, 2003
- Winner of the Kathryn H. Parlan Screenwriting Award
- Winner of a Zaki Gordon Award for Excellence in Screenwriting
- American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee Jack Shaheen Scholarship
- Hubert Bals Development Award 2005
- Sundance Screenwriters Lab Selection 2005
- Berlinale Co-Production Market Selection (Talent) 2005
- Paris Cinema Project Selection 2005
- Recipient of Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media 2007
- Winner of Groupama Gan Foundation Award 2006
- Sopadin Finalist, Grand Prix du Meilleur Scenariste 2007

#### **Selected Film Awards & Festivals**

- *World Premiere*, Cannes Film Festival, Official Select, Cinéfondation

- *National Finalist* - Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Student Academy Awards
- *Best Short Screenplay* - Nantucket Film Festival
- *Best Short Film* - Palm Springs International Short Film Festival
- *Best Short Film (Emerging Narrative)* - IFP/New York
- *Silver Plaque* - Chicago International Film Festival
- *Best Short Film* - Institute Du Monde Arabe Biannual
- *Best Screenwriting* - Lenola Film Festival, Italy
- *Best Short Film Second Prize* - Lenola Film Festival, Italy
- *Audience Choice Award* - Polo Ralph Lauren Columbia University Fest.
- *Special Jury Prize* - Ramallah International Film Festival
- *Best Short Film, Luis Trenker Award* - 4Film Festival, Italy
- *Sélection Officielle Corto Cortissimo* - Venice Film Festival
- *Locarno Film Festival, Official Selection*
- *Edinburgh International Film Festival, Official Selection*
- *Telluride Film Festival, Official Selection*
- *New York Film Festival, Official Selection*
- *Karlovy Vary Film Festival, Czech Republic*
- *Sarajevo Film Festival, Bosnia*
- *Carthage Film Festival (Journées Cin. de Carthage), Tunis*
- *Clermont Ferrand Short Film Festival, France*

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ENTRY DENIED

I have been looking forward to this week for months now – it was to be one of the most important moments for me - the world premiere of my feature film “milh hadha al- bahr” (Salt of this Sea) in Palestine.

The premiere was to take place in Amari Refugee camp in Ramallah, with the cast and crew, the people who helped make this film happen, who believe in it, to be in attendance. An outdoor screening and an occasion to share the completion of a project which has been the result of a five-year struggle. What made this event so special was that it is also a big celebration for us – that we received the incredible news that the film was selected for the Cannes Film Festival as an Official Selection (May 14<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008).

As you may know, the Israeli Authorities have not allowed me to return to Palestine for 9 months now. Because of this we were not able to film a main scene of the film and in the end, the scene had to be shot in Marseille, France. My lawyer has been working now for

eight months on the issue of my return home. So for the premiere of the film, I also had an invitation from the French Consulate in Jerusalem, who have been supporters of the film, and the International Art Academy of Ramallah were co-sponsoring the screening. There was nothing I was looking forward to more than finally being back in Palestine and sharing the film.

From Amman, Jordan, I took the bus to the Allenby bridge (Sheikh Hussein) in order to cross the Jordanian border and enter the West Bank. I arrived at the bridge at 10 in the morning. The Israelis held me there for six hours, during which time I was interrogated approximately five times. In the beginning I was made to wait in the main room with all the other people crossing. After some time, I was taken to another section in the back, separated from the others, and spent the remaining period of my time waiting there alone. Every now and then people would come in and out of a door, sometimes to ask me questions, sometimes just on their way somewhere else. My telephone was taken from me.

At the end, I was then taken to the general room once more and asked to sit and wait. After about 20 minutes, a woman in a blue uniform (the others wore a different uniform), came towards me with my passport in her hand and four security agents behind her. She handed me my passport and said, "The Israeli Ministry of Interior has denied you entry." I asked if a reason was given. She said, "You spend too much time here." I was then deported - escorted by two of the agents out of the terminal and onto a bus back to Jordan.

I got on the bus. I felt like my legs weren't strong enough to carry me.

April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Annemarie Jacir

