

Planet in Focus, Voices Forward and the International Diaspora Film Festival collaborate on unprecedented LAND & CONFLICT program

Toronto, October 5, 2009 – The 10th annual **Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival, Voices Forward** and the **International Diaspora Film Festival** have banded together in a joint initiative entitled **Land & Conflict** to present an unprecedented program of artistic works in the medium of film, photography, poetry and music focused on people and land in contested terrain. Palestinian, Israeli, Bedouin, Burmese and Diasporic viewpoints are represented in a rich panoply of artistic expression that begins during the Planet in Focus Festival (October 21-25) and segues through to the International Diaspora Film Festival (November 1-8).

The **Land & Conflict** screenings includes such **films** as the **Canadian premiere** of *Voices from El Sayed* (2008, Oded Adomi Leshem), a multi-layered Israeli film that delicately documents the reactions and dilemma of villagers to an impending cochlear implant on a child in the Bedouin village of El Sayed, home to the largest community of deaf people in the world; and *Jerusalem Moments 2009* featuring 7 young Palestinian and Israeli directors in a series of shorts that reflect the complexity of urban life in Jerusalem in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Land & Conflict launches on October 24 at Arta Gallery in the Distillery District with a **photography** exhibit with famed Canadian photographer **Anne Bayin** and Iranian-born Montreal photographer **Babak Salari**, as well as an installation-like screening of *Kalandia - A Checkpoint's Story (59/Israel/2009)* that documents Kalandia, an Israeli military checkpoint on the road between East Jerusalem and Ramallah over six years by filmmaker **Neta Efrony**.

The series also includes a **literary evening** with Palestinian-Canadian writer and activist **Hanadi Loubani**, and a highly-anticipated concert on November 3 with New York's **David Amram and Friends** who perform *A Musical Mosaic Celebrating the Spirit of Diaspora* with music from the Middle East including Arab, Jewish, Iranian, Afghani and Pakistani influenced arrangements.

The detailed schedule, organized by discipline, follows:

VISUAL & LITERARY ARTS:

Saturday, October 24, 2:00pm-6:00pm. Opening and Reception

Launching Land & Conflict is a Photography Exhibition: Babak Salari and Anne Bayin at Arta Gallery in the Distillery District, 55 Mill Street, Suite 102, Bldg. 9. FREE.

Off The Wall

Babak Salari, an Iranian photographer in exile, presents a photographic chronicle of the wall separating Israel and Palestine in 2004.

Babak Salari is a Montreal-based documentary photographer and cultural activist. Originally from Iran, he has been living in exile in Canada for the past 22 years. He has created several bodies of work exploring the double consciousness of otherness, marginality and diasporic identity. Educated at Concordia University and Dawson Institute of Photography, Babak has been acclaimed for his high degree of technical and artistic accomplishment.

The Liberty Project

Photographer **Anne Bayin** presents her latest exploration of social justice and liberty, with portraits of high-ranking politicians and artists wearing a mask of Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisoned opposition leader of Burma. The notables include Vaclav Havel, Margaret Atwood and many more.

Anne Bayin is a photographer and writer of Burmese and Scottish descent. In the mid-90's, during her extensive career as a television journalist, Bayin co-produced The Prisoner, a documentary on Aung San Suu Kyi for CBC's Man Alive. Her photographs and writings have appeared in many national and international publications. Her artistic work is part of the acclaimed M.I.L.K. collection, where her award-winning portrait Kim Phuc and Thomas was exhibited in New York, London, Sydney and featured in Family: A Celebration of Humanity.

Sunday, November 1, 5:30pm-7:30pm.

Perspectives on the Wall. A Reading with Hanadi Loubani at Arta Gallery. FREE.

Hanadi Loubani, a Palestinian-Canadian writer and activist, presents a series of poetic works and writings on the theme of Land & Conflict.

SCREENING PROGRAM:

Films during Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival

Saturday, October 24, 3:00pm-4:00pm, At Arta Gallery. FREE.

Kalandia - A Checkpoint's Story (59/Israel/2009)

Over a span of six years, filmmaker **Neta Efrony**, a member of Machsom Watch (Checkpoint Watch), documented Kalandia (an Israeli military checkpoint) on the road between East Jerusalem and Ramallah that grew and expanded into becoming a Terminal. *Followed by a post-screening discussion.*

Saturday, October 24, 9:00pm-11:00pm, At the Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, South Entrance.

Voices From El Sayed (75/Israel/2008)

Tickets \$10/\$8 students, seniors

The Bedouin village of El Sayed houses the largest community of deaf people in the world. When Salim, a villager, is presented with an opportunity to offer his son Muhammad a cochlear implant, the close-knit community has mixed reactions in this beautiful and layered documentary by award-winning filmmaker Oded Adomi Leshem. *Producer Itay Ken-Tor will be in attendance for a post-screening discussion.*

Sunday, October 25, 3:00pm-5:00pm, At Innis College, 2 Sussex Drive. Tickets \$10/\$8 students, seniors

Jerusalem Moments 2009 (88/Israel/Palestine, 2009)

Seven young Palestinian and Israeli directors create short documentaries that reflect the complexity of urban life in Jerusalem in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The series was commissioned by Ir Amim (City of Nations), a non-profit and non-partisan organization in Jerusalem founded to actively engage in issues impacting Israeli-Palestinian relations in Jerusalem and the political future of the city. *A post-screening discussion includes participating filmmakers Amber Fares and Daniel Gal.*

Films during International Diaspora Film Festival:

Thursday November 5, 7:00pm, At Innis Town Hall. Tickets \$10/\$8 students, seniors

Z32 (81/Israel-France/2008)

A former Israeli soldier is burdened by guilt over a revenge operation in which two Palestinian policemen were murdered. Directed by acclaimed documentary and experimental filmmaker Avi Mograbi.

Sunday, November 8, 2:00pm, Double Bill At Innis Town Hall. Tickets \$10/\$8 students, seniors

Jaffawiye (18/Israel/2008)

The seaside town of Jaffa is the wellspring of a socially conscious group of rap musicians made up of Arabs, Jews and multiethnic immigrants who reside there.

On Hold (52/Israel/2007)

A young Palestinian couple, who are also actors, feel they have no future as citizens residing in the State of Israel and plan their departure in this poignant documentary directed by Rokaya Sabbah, herself at the story's centre.

Sunday, November 8, 8:00pm, At Innis Town Hall. Tickets \$10/\$8 students, seniors

Jaffa (100/Israel/2009)

Jaffa, the ancient Mediterranean port city, is the setting for what at first appears to be a contemporary Romeo and Juliet drama. Mali, a young Jewish woman, is in love with Toufik, a young Arab man, who works in her father's garage together with his own father. Keren Yedaya, whose film *Or* won the Caméra d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004, directs this moving drama. *Director Keren Yedaya will be in attendance for a post-screening discussion.*

MUSIC PROGRAM:

Tuesday, November 3, 8:00pm.

At Home Around the World - A Musical Mosaic With David Amram and Friends Celebrating the Spirit of Diaspora at Revival Bar, 783 College Street. Tickets \$25/\$20 students, seniors

An evening of music from the Middle East, including Arab, Jewish, Iranian, Afghani and Pakistani influences arranged by New York City's legendary **David Amram** in conjunction with Small World Music and local musicians.

For over fifty years, Jewish composer and writer **David Amram** has composed orchestral and chamber music works, written many scores for Broadway theatre and film, including the scores for *Splendor in The Grass* and *The Manchurian Candidate*; the groundbreaking Holocaust opera *The Final Ingredient*; and the score for the landmark 1959 documentary *Pull My Daisy*, narrated by novelist Jack Kerouac. He recently collaborated with the late Frank McCourt (*Angela's Ashes*) on *Missa Manhattan* and completed the score for Teri McLuhan's documentary, *Frontier Gandhi: Badshah Khan*, which opens the International Diaspora Film Festival.

ABOUT LAND & CONFLICT:

Land & Conflict is curated by the directors of three festivals: **Amit Breuer** of **Voices Forward**, **Shahram Tabe** of the **International Diaspora Film Festival** and **Candida Paltiel** of **Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival**. Common to all three festivals is the exploration of land and conflict and the direct impact on the lives of individuals and communities at the heart of a tempestuous environment.

The tenth annual **Planet in Focus** film festival **features over 85 films on environmental issues** from 25 countries. It also features facilitated pre- and post-screening discussions and panels, a film industry symposium as well as special programs for children and schools. It hosts a Green Market and presents three Eco-Hero Awards (Canadian, International and Industry), film awards and the Mark Haslam Award. Environmental artistic expression is presented to audiences as a catalyst for public awareness and action, but each film stands as a unique work of cinematic art devoted to the ecological and social health of the planet. www.planetinfocus.org.

The **International Diaspora Film Festival** (IDFF) provides Toronto audiences with an opportunity to experience the cultural mosaic of the present world through the medium of cinema. "Diaspora" refers to the dispersion and migration of a people from their homeland and the subsequent communities formed in new lands. The IDFF is unique in showcasing films from a wide variety of diaspora that promote cultural dialogue and tolerance. www.diasporafilmfest.com

Voices Forward was formed in 2006 to foster a festival dedicated to building bridges between the Israeli and Palestinian communities. With a focus on courageous stories from both sides, Voices Forward illustrates that nothing can communicate humanity and the human experience better than art. www.voicesforward.org

In announcing the program, **Breuer** says, "Voices Forward is thrilled to join forces with PIF and IDFF this year. We believe that together we can bring Toronto audiences alternatives stories and voices from the Middle East that are rarely heard in the mainstream media or even in other arts organizations throughout the country."

Tabé adds, "Rumi, the great Iranian poet and philosopher, talks of "Truth" as an elephant in the dark. People touch different parts of the big animal and start to fight over what an elephant looks like. Only when light is shed does everybody realize that they are both right and wrong. Individually they are wrong, but collectively right. Under the Land & Conflict program, we are trying to shed light on this truth that mankind, despite all their conflicts, are of the same nature, and that no single culture can live without or above others."

Paltiel closes with, "One finds, that regardless of the points of view revealed here, there is a yearning for a sense of place, justice and dignity on the patch of earth portrayed. Where one cannot find it, we witness the causes and making of exilic communities with all the pain that departures ensue, in spite of the hope for new beginnings in countries like our own. Though human environments are tested in an overheated cauldron, these artists shed light and hope in the darkest of corners in this unique program."

Tickets for Films during Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival:

416-967-1528 OR visit the Box Office in person at 2 Carlton St., West Mezzanine. Tickets at venues one hour prior to show.
www.planetinfocus.org

Tickets for Music and Film Programs after October 25 at International Diaspora Film Festival:

416-571-2150 OR email info@diasporafilmfest.com / www.diasporafilmfest.com

Land & Conflict Venues & Information Numbers:

Arta Gallery: 55 Mill Street Suite 102, Bldg. 9, Toronto | 416-364-2782.
All events at Arta Gallery are FREE.

Royal Ontario Museum: 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, South Entrance
Films: **\$10** (\$8 seniors and students, \$5 under 12) **416-967-1528** or visit www.planetinfocus.org

Innis Town Hall: 2 Sussex Drive, Toronto
Films: **Oct 21-25: \$10** (\$8 seniors and students, \$5 under 12) **416-967-1528** www.planetinfocus.org
Nov 4-8: \$10 (\$8 seniors and students, \$5 under 12). **416 571-2150** or email info@diasporafilmfest.com / www.diasporafilmfest.com

Revival Bar: 783 College Street (at Shaw), Toronto | 416-535-7888.
November 3, 8:00pm. At Home Around the World - A Musical Mosaic With David Amram and Friends
Tickets **\$25** (\$20 students, seniors) **416-571-2150** or email info@diasporafilmfest.com
Info: www.smallworldmusic.com / www.diasporafilmfest.com