

## 7<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival Delivers Unforgettable Experiences

- *High-profile dignitaries and celebrities from the Arab world and international cinema participated in festival events*
- *DFI co-financed film 'It Must Be Heaven' by Elia Suleiman opened the festival*
- *Programme included 23 features and 73 shorts; 50 from the Arab World; 56 by women filmmakers and 19 DFI-supported films*

**Doha, Qatar; 24 November 2019:** The seventh edition of the Ajyal Film Festival, the Doha Film Institute's (DFI) annual cinema event, presented an exciting slate of film screening, events, exhibits and performances during its six-day run from November 18- 23 at Katara Cultural Village under the theme 'Find Film, Find Life'.

Ajyal kicked off with a festive red-carpet event, drawing distinguished guests, senior officials and dignitaries from Qatar, DFI board members, as well as renowned regional and international talent. Local dignitaries and members of the DFI Board of Trustees in attendance included HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of the Doha Film Institute; HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, Minister of State; HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Member of DFI Board of Trustees; and HE Issa Bin Mohammed Al-Mohannadi, Managing Director Barwa Real Estate and Vice-Chairman of the DFI Board of Directors. Filmmakers and creative talents included actor and producer, Chace Crawford in partnership with beIN and Sundance TV and British actor Kris Hitchen. This was followed by the Middle East premier of DFI co-financed film ***It Must Be Heaven*** (France, Canada, Palestine/2019) by award-winning Palestinian auteur Elia Suleiman.

This year, the festival showcased 96 films from 39 countries that express the power of storytelling in transforming minds. The programme included 23 features and 73 shorts, 50 from the Arab World and 56 by women filmmakers. A special **Made in India** programme paid tribute to the Qatar-India Year of Culture 2019 with an exciting programme of eight short films from the country and special screenings of Gitanjali Rao's ***Bombay Rose*** (India, France, UK, Qatar/2019) supported by the DFI.

The highly anticipated **Made in Qatar** programme presented by Ooredoo highlighted the works of 23 emerging Qatar-based filmmakers to nurture home-grown talents in support of the country's robust national filmmaking industry. The **Made in Qatar** jury was comprised of Sudanese filmmaker Amjad Abu Alala, British actor Kris Hitchen and Qatari architect and urbanist Fatma Al Sahlawi.

Delivering the magic of cinema to all audiences for the fifth time, the **Made in Qatar: An Inclusive Experience** presented in partnership with the Translation and Interpreting Institute (TII) of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Hamad bin Khalifa University made film accessible to all, regardless of physical obstacles.

Ajyal 2019 hosted some key personalities in films, arts and government as part of its **Meet the Talent** and **Ajyal Talks** series. Jason Silva, in partnership with WISE, held an engaging discussion titled *How to dream with your eyes open*; HE Salah bin Ghanem Al Ali, Minister of Culture and Sports, addressed the jurors to speak about the value of learning and discovery to unlock unique opportunities for our youth; Qatari artist Bouthayna Al Muftah spoke on the inherent joy of creativity; while Palestinian auteur Elia Suleiman discussed his creative journey in cinema.

Showcasing and celebrating arts of every discipline, the **Ajyal Creativity Hub** delighted visitors with exciting performances, exhibits and events throughout the festival. Qatar's largest pop-culture event presented in partnership with Qatar National Tourism Council, **Geekdom** drew swarms of visitors to experience a one-of-a-kind Cosplay Competition, special feature films, and **Geekdom Talks** on a variety of topics including *Sci-Fi and Fantasy Production in Qatar*.

Ajyal's interactive multimedia exhibition **ARC** displayed eclectic artworks by 19 of Qatar's most promising artists and creative talents, following the chronological path of narrative through multimedia art pieces divided into three distinct parts— Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution.

Electrifying performances from Doha's underground music scene took centerstage at **Ajyal Tunes**, an exciting celebration of musical talents from every discipline, while **SONY Cinema Under the Stars** offered a unique cinematic experience to festival goers with enchanting night-time feature film screenings at the Museum of Islamic Art Park. A special **Kids Red Carpet** welcomed Ajyal's youngest film enthusiasts to a fun screening of Victor Fleming's cherished classic *The Wizard of Oz* (USA/1939).

The festival culminated in a festive closing night reception and awards ceremony, where the winners of the Ajyal Jury Competition and Made in Qatar Competition were announced. Over 450 young Ajyal Jurors from 45 countries, including 48 international jurors, who travelled to Doha for the event from Armenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Italy, Iraq, India, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mozambique, Oman, Palestine, Turkey, Tunisia and the United Kingdom. Jurors were divided into three age categories: Mohaq (8-12 year olds), Hilal (13-17 year olds), and Bader (18-21 year olds) to evaluate a selection of shorts and feature films.

2019 Ajyal Film Festival's Official Partners include: **Katara Cultural Village** – Cultural Partner; **Qatar National Tourism Council** – Principal Partner; **Novo Cinemas**, **Ooredoo** – Strategic Partner, **St. Regis Doha** - Signature Partner.

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### About Doha Film Institute

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and

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entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

**Doha Film Institute**

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