

Press Release

## Films about identity and environmental destruction spark intense dialogue among jurors at the 10<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival 2022

- *Enthusiastic youth jury watch the delightful **Dragon Princess**, and the thought-provoking environment documentary, **The Territory***

**Doha, Qatar; October 2, 2022:** Questions came pouring from the youth jurors at the Special Edition of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival in their first day of interactions with filmmakers, eager to know more about the filmmaking process and what inspires directors to take up bold themes.

Mohaqa jurors, the youngest group of 8 to 12-year-olds, who watched the animation, **Dragon Princess** (France/2021) had questions on the film's narrative, highlighting their keen sense of observation. Taking their queries, director Jean-Jacques Denis said the film's setting was an ode to childhood, with characters built around the key protagonist, a young girl raised by a dragon.

As she embarks on a journey of discovery into the world of humans, she soon discovers the hypocrisy of high society and runs into conflict. "Ultimately, the film is about individuals trying to find their place, without compromising on their ideals, in a world that expects them to be somebody else."

Denis said the film is a celebration of teamwork, and his own motto is to move forward with every project, having started his career as a storyboard artist. He said he wanted to create "a simple film, not a simplistic one, with a strong message youth could identify with."

And if the eagerness of the young people in asking questions was any indication, he has indeed succeeded in his mission.

Hilal Jurors (aged 13 to 17) watched a thought-provoking documenting, **The Territory** (Brazil, Denmark, USA/2022), which follows the vital, inspiring fight of the indigenous Uru-eu-wau-wau people of Brazil to defend their land from non-indigenous farmers intent on colonizing their protected territory. Serious in its content, the film unfolds in a captivating, humanistic manner and the youth could readily identify with the subject matter.

The screening was followed by an intense discussion by the jurors, who raised important questions such as the role of art and cinema in making positive change.

Citing the documentary, they observed that while art does have the power to influence, it need not necessarily lead to desired consequences. They underlined the role young people can play in driving change, especially as they are 'more mindful' of environmental degradation and its impact on vulnerable communities.

The jurors debated whether a documentary director should be personally involved in altering the course of the events he/she is filming, before agreeing that documentary makers are not expected to influence or change the reality of the situation. **The Territory**, they said, opened their eyes to how the destruction of the Amazon rainforests have been happening, and described it as a captivating work.

The youth also discussed the role of documentaries, and whether directors must film real world situations or explore their own creativity to tell the story. They concluded that what makes documentaries powerful are the raw emotions they portray, echoing Werner Herzog's observation that many of his documentaries are feature films in disguise, and what matters is that they must bring out the essential human truth, the power of facts. As Herzog said: "We are not flies on the wall, and we must divorce documentaries from mere investigative journalism."

The eight-day festival will screen a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to over 600 jurors from 50 countries. They will also take part in the Ajyal Talks and Spotlight sessions in addition to taking part in lively discussions on cinema and critiquing the movies they watched.

Katara is the Cultural Partner of the Special 10<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival. Contributing Partners include Darwish Holding, the Official Electronics Provider; with FNAC, Sony and 51 East; Qommunication is the Social Media Partner; and Friends of the Festival include Alkalive, the Official Water Sponsor; Giffoni, Qatar Museums, Leisure (Virtuocity).

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