

7th Ajyal Film Festival Opens with Glittering Red-Carpet Event

- *High-profile dignitaries and celebrities from the Arab world and international cinema attend the opening gala at Katara Cultural Village*
- *DFI co-financed film 'It Must Be Heaven' by Elia Suleiman opened the festival*

Doha, Qatar; 19 November 2019: The seventh edition of the Ajyal Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute (DFI), marked its opening night against the mesmerising backdrop of Katara Cultural Village yesterday night (18 November). The opening night's red carpet was lined with distinguished guests, senior officials and dignitaries from Qatar and the wider Arab world, DFI board members, as well as celebrities from regional and international cinema.

Channelling the true spirit of cinema and growing a strong national creative industry through an integrative exchange with youths and thought leaders from around the world, Ajyal 2019 will run for a total of six days to conclude on 23 November.

On occasion of the festival opening, HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of the Doha Film Institute, said: "The immense success of the Institute and its impact on our thriving local film industry is the result of the dedication and hard work of our people, our partners and long-term supporters. We share a dream in Qatar Vision 2030 to provide an international platform that is rooted in our history and culture, while staying connected to modern life. This year's films tell stories across multiple mediums, allowing audiences to experience powerful content. From here, we invite production companies to mentor our youth and contribute to the creation of compelling Arabic content that is of world-class standard."

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Festival Director and Chief Executive Officer of DFI, said: "Our 2019 festival theme '*Find Film, Find Life*' pays homage to the power of storytelling in illuminating our daily reality and evoking change. For the past decade, the Doha Film Institute has stood at the forefront of authentic content creation and storytelling in the Arab world and beyond. With the support of our leadership, government and private sector entities, and collaborators, we continue to empower genuine voices and create a lasting platform for exchange and development through the arts."

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 Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Member of DFI Board of Trustees; HE Nasser Bin Ghanem Al-Khulaifi, Chairman of the beIN Media Group and member of the DFI Board of Trustees; HE Issa Bin Mohammed Al-Mohannadi, Managing Director Barwa Real Estate and Vice-Chairman of the DFI Board of Directors; and HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, Minister of State.

Filmmakers and creative talents from the region and beyond included special guest and actor, Chace Crawford, Mohamed El Mustafa, and Kris Hitchen. Qatari filmmakers and talents on the red carpet

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included Salah Al Mulla, Khalifa Al Marri, A.J. Al-Thani, Hamida Issa, Abdulaziz Yousif and Nouf Al-Sulaiti, among others.

In line with its overarching theme, Ajyal 2019 opened with the Middle East premier of DFI co-financed film *It Must Be Heaven* (France, Canada, Palestine/2019), a satirical comedy of identity, nationality and belonging that follows award-winning Palestinian auteur Elia Suleiman's personal story of leaving his homeland Palestine for the bustling metropolises of Paris and New York.

This year, the festival will showcase 96 films from 39 countries that express the power of storytelling in transforming minds. There are 23 features and 73 shorts, including 50 from the Arab World and 56 by women filmmakers. A special **Made in India** programme will pay tribute to the Qatar-India Year of Culture 2019, and the highly anticipated **Made in Qatar** programme returns under Ooredoo's sponsorship to highlight emerging Qatari and Qatar-based filmmakers and nurture home-grown talents in support of the country's robust national filmmaking industry.

Tickets for the 7th Ajyal Film Festival are available for purchase at the Ajyal Main Box Office located in Katara Building 10; at the Ajyal Box Office at VOX Cinemas Doha Festival City for screenings taking place at VOX Cinemas; and from the Novo Cinemas Box Office for screenings at Novo Cinemas, the Pearl. For ticket purchase and up-to-date information on the Ajyal Film Festival, please visit:

<https://www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival/ticketinformation>

<https://www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival/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 entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

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