

Press Release

‘We are deprived of the opportunity to work with our Arab brethren,’ says actor Saleh Bakri

- *The acclaimed actor from Palestine highlighted the challenges creative artists face living under occupation*
- *Bakri said the young Ajyal Jurors inspire him with their genuine concern and care for the Palestinian people*

Doha, Qatar; October 5, 2022: In an emotionally charged interaction with Ajyal Jurors and later with the media at the Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival, Saleh Bakri, an internationally renowned actor from Palestine, shared the tremendous challenges he and fellow artists face while living under occupation.

On his experience of working on **‘Costa Brava, Lebanon’** by Mounia Akl, in Lebanon, Bakri said it was “amazing and enriching.” He narrated the struggles he had to face to make it happen. “I live in Palestine, and I cannot move freely because am a Palestinian living under occupation, which imposes on me their passport. I have to carry a passport that I have not chosen, and I have to be a citizen of a state I didn’t choose.”

He said this has led to travel restrictions within the Arab world. “It is very hard, if not impossible, for me or my peers to travel to Lebanon and some other Arab states. I had to request a passport from the Palestinian Authority to travel to Lebanon, and immediately upon my return, it was seized by the Israeli authorities.”

“It saddens me that I cannot work with my Arab brethren – the Syrians, Jordanians, Lebanese, Iraqis... I do not see any difference between us. I do not acknowledge the borders between us. We have one culture, of course with diversity; but we are deprived of this diversity, of being able to work together,” said Bakri, who gained global fame through several films such as **Wajib** by Annemarie Jacir and **The Present** by Farah Nabulsi.

Bakri said artists in Palestine are caught between “a hammer and an anvil; we are always considered guilty until proven innocent. This is a very disturbing situation, to live constantly under suspicion. We have proven ourselves in cinema, poetry, literature, art and music. Those who refuse to work with us are the losers, just as we lose the opportunity to communicate with our brothers and sisters.”

He said the relentless struggles has made him tired and weary, but he will not let go of his dreams. “It is a long road filled with hardship to have freedom. We live in the nostalgia of our past, and a craving to communicate with the Arab world freely.”

Bakri said he is confident of the future of Arab cinema. “I believe that things are moving forward; the work by our young filmmakers are inspiring. Arab cinema will develop and grow, and we are seeing proof of that. We are making great films that make an imprint globally. I hope we will also expand our wings and deliver even more powerful work in theatre, television and web series as well.”

Sharing his dream of playing the historical figure, Al Hallaj, Bakri said “he has a complex personality and represents a grand period in our history. We must honour our historical figures more through our cinema and arts.”

Bakri was particularly touched by the genuine care and understanding of the Ajyal Jurors, aged 8 to 25, saying, “the Ajyal Film Festival is a rare platform that gives young people the opportunity to express themselves. It gives voice to the young generation, and this initiative must be lauded. I was touched by the fact that our young generation is open to our work, especially independent cinema, and to the efforts of Arab filmmakers.”

He also lauded the work of the Doha Film Institute, saying: “It does a brave job of supporting independent cinema. They are in fact the first supporters of independent cinema throughout the Arab world – from Mauritania to Kuwait and Iraq, and they are doing a great job. I have worked in many films supported by the Institute and see many DFI-supported films feted at global film festivals. DFI is indeed a source of pride for Arab filmmakers.”

The Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival will screen a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to over 613 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 10th 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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