

WEGA FILM & LES FILMS DU LOSANGE present

برای یک لحظه آزادی

# FOR A MOMENT FREEDOM



OVERCOME YOUR NIGHTMARES TO ACHIEVE YOUR DREAMS



"SMOOTH BALANCE OF  
REALISM, WARMTH, SUSPENSE,  
HUMOR AND TRAGEDY.  
BITTERSWEET, QUITE MOVING."

— VARIETY —

A FILM BY  
ARASH T. RIAHI



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# FOR A MOMENT FREEDOM

OVERCOME YOUR NIGHTMARES TO ACHIEVE YOUR DREAMS

A FILM BY  
**ARASH T. RIAHI**

AUSTRIA'S ENTRY FOR THE  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACADEMY AWARDS

[www.ForAMomentFreedom.com](http://www.ForAMomentFreedom.com)

2008 – Austrian / French – 35 mm – Color – 1.85 – SRD – 1 h 50

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BEST FIRST FEATURE FILM

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BEST FIRST FEATURE FILM

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BEST AUSTRIAN FILM 08

AMAZONAS FILM  
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GRAND PRIZE &  
FOR BEST MOVIE &  
PUBLIC'S PRIZE

19<sup>TH</sup> FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL  
DU FILM D'HISTOIRE / PESSAC 08  
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STUDENT AWARD &  
PUBLIC'S PRIZE

FESTIVAL DU CINÉMA EUROPÉEN  
EN ESSONNE / FRANCE 08  
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STUDENT AWARD

MAX OPHÜLS FILM-  
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DE LUZ / BIARRITZ 08  
CHRISTERA AWARD  
BEST DIRECTING

10<sup>TH</sup> FESTIVAL DEL CINEMA  
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SPECIAL JURY AWARD &  
SPECIAL AUDITION AWARD

THOMAS PLUCH  
SCREENPLAY AWARD  
DIAGONALE 09  
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SCHWERIN 09  
THE FLYING OX &  
NDR-DIRECTORS PRIZE

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SAN LUIS CINE / ARGENTINA 08  
BEST SCREENPLAY

AUDIENCE AWARD  
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FESTIVAL / OSLO 09



## SYNOPSIS

**A**li and Merdad, two young Iranian men, try to bring their cousins, Asy (7) and Arman (5), from Iran to Turkey in order to join their parents in Austria. Waiting for the visa in Ankara, they share their life with other refugees: a couple and their son desperate to prove to the authorities that they are victims of a political persecution, a Persian teacher and a young Kurd who fight their miserable situation with a big sense of humour. A film based on true stories about a group of refugees trying desperately to reach the holy land of freedom.



"TOUCHING STORY  
THAT RINGS UNBEARINGLY TRUE."  
ARTS & OPINION



# INTERVIEW WITH ARASH T. RIAHI

■ **How did you first come up with the subject matter of the film?**

I was born in Iran and fled my homeland when I was 9 years old with my parents, hoping to be accepted as political refugees in Europe. My siblings were at that time too small to come with us. They joined us more than a year later thanks to my cousin and a friend of ours. So one of the stories in the film is very close to me. All the other stories are also based on true incidents of close friends or on stories that I've researched over the last few years. But the topic of this film was and will always be a big part of my life.

■ **How much of the material is directly based on your own personal experience?**

I would say 25% of the story. But naturally I've even changed the parts that were based on my experience for dramatic effect. My goal was not to tell the story of my life, but 3 exemplary stories about people in search of freedom no matter where they came from. On the one hand I was interested in how these different people, both young and old, deal with this extreme situation, and on the other hand I wanted to pay tribute to all the people who experienced such sufferings and even died for a glimpse of freedom.

■ **How much did your last documentary inspire your feature film *For A Moment Of Freedom*?**



My documentary *Exile Family Movie* was about the life of my family over the last 15 years in Europe and the USA. Unlike what I'd done before, I wanted to make a film taking place in between different worlds and not in the countries the refugees have fled or want to reach. I wanted to show what people go through to come to Europe and I meant to make clear that they definitely have no alternative.

■ **What are the chances of a family to cross the border and not get caught? How much does it cost in general?**

The chances are quite high, otherwise there wouldn't be so many illegal people in Europe. When we were in Turkey to do research 2 years ago, our Kurdish guide asked us if we wanted to



go to one of the places where you could see people crossing the border to Turkey! I'm not sure about the cost but I think it's somewhere between 5,000 and 20,000 Euros.

■ **You point to the brutality of the political police that stops the bus at the beginning of the film. Can you tell me more about it?**

The "Pasdaran" a.k.a. "Revolutionary Guards" are charged with guarding the Revolution itself. Having this responsibility gives them a lot of leeway in controlling, torturing and even killing suspects.

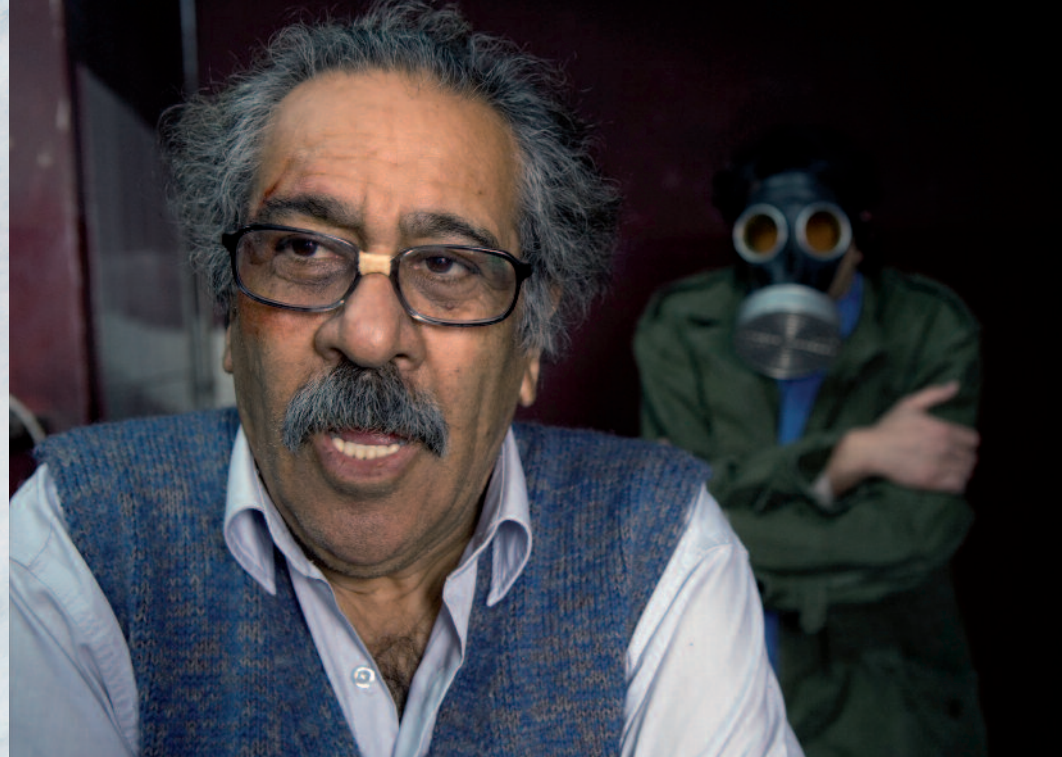
■ **The opening scene is a pan shot that shows people being executed by the military. This sets the tone for the whole film...**

This and the following scene with the children and the smuggler which is lighter and funnier. For me the juxtaposition of tragic and humorous ele-

ments is extremely important. I regard humour as the best survival technique, and if you don't keep at least a minimum of your sense of humour when you are in such extreme situations, you are bound to be destroyed. After all, there isn't a great deal more you can hold on to.

■ **When they get to Ankara, the political refugees in the film survive in dire conditions... Were you particularly aiming at Turkey or at any country hosting illegal immigrants?**

Actually it's not about Turkey, it could be any other country, any place between the 2 worlds. I wanted to make a universal film about people trying to find a better life elsewhere, either for political or for humanistic reasons. I think anyone should have the right to live wherever they think is best for them. And in normal conditions people only leave their country and their family if they really have to or are forced to do so.



■ **You also denounce the collusion between the Turkish government and the Iranian secret services...**

Yes, it's a fact that the secret services of these countries work together. I was told so on my research journeys in Turkey. I met in the border city of Van some refugees that told me horrible stories. And when we started shooting the film in the Turkish city Erzurum, the Iranian consulate tried to cancel our shooting permit. Fortunately our production company was able to convince the mayor of the city that it would benefit his city if he let us shoot there. And with the European university Olympics coming up in Erzurum in 2011, the mayor decided to be on our side to show the West that a big project could be made in his city!

■ **The UN seems to be powerless and remains passive most of the time. Do you think that they could do more or that they are totally dependent on Europe's immigration policy?**

I think the UN is not powerless, though they are not as strong as they should be. They help a lot of people, like they helped us when we were in Turkey. But in the end they are as strong as the governments let them be. These governments come up with more and more regulations and laws against refugees – and the UN cannot possibly ignore these laws.





**"A FILM WHICH SUCCESSFULLY LINKS  
GREAT EMOTIONS AND POWERFUL ISSUES."**

**KINOZEIT.DE**



■ **At some point, one of the kids wonders why people need documents to meet their parents. Although it's put very simply, it seems to be one of the key issues of the film and of today's society...**

Yes. Unfortunately bureaucracy is seen as the solution for most of the problems in our society. And when a refugee jumps out of the window and kills himself because he doesn't want to be sent back to his country, we should reconsider the concept of bureaucracy. How desperate must someone be to do such a thing?

■ **In one heartbreaking scene, one character goes so far as to set fire to himself in front of the UN headquarters. Do you believe that the Iranian regime drives people to such desperate moves?**

One of the refugees who plays a small role in the film was waiting in line when someone set himself on fire some years ago. The Iranian regime not only drives people to these extremes, but they kill a lot of people outside Iran. You can find the list of their acts of terrorism on the Internet. The cynical thing is – most European countries let the killers run free, only Germany condemned Iran for unleashing state terror in the "Mykonos Judgment" (1992).

■ **The film features a variety of very different characters that share one goal: leave Iran and find refuge in Europe. How did you manage to make them so endearing? How did you go about the writing of the script?**

It was a very long writing process that started in 2000. I did some research journeys to Turkey in order to see what had changed over the last years. I made a lot of interviews with refugees and NGOs and I attended some scriptwriting workshops like Equinoxe or the Sundance Lab.



All of this helped me find the right balance of tragedy and humour that is essential for a dramatic topic about life.

■ **Did you do any research to portray the secret agents who torture one of the characters?**

Yes, of course. I know quite a lot of people who were imprisoned and caught by the secret police. I talked to them and I also made some journeys to the border between Turkey and Iran to meet refugees and talk to them. They told me that they avoid going out of their flats because they are too afraid of the Iranian secret police and also of the Turkish police. There is a lot of examples of ill-treated and displaced persons who where never found again.

■ **This is your first feature film. What were your filmmaking priorities?**

Since I've made documentary films in the past, people may expect me to do a documentary-like feature film, but I have always wanted to go for poetic realism. I wanted to use visual techniques and a narrative which would allow the film to work on other levels than the documentary aspect. While in pre-production I kept one point





in mind: how can a feature film go beyond documentary form? I had already made two documentary films which were in part highly personal, and I didn't want to repeat myself in my debut feature film. I used to think feature films could never be more "real" or "authentic" than documentary films. It may all be "fake", but perhaps that allows you to achieve a greater truth, because you can also use other forms and methods – and you can be more radical.



■ **How did you pick the main actors? Are any of them non-professional actors?**

We spent over a year and a half casting the film, in Berlin and then in Stockholm, later in London, Paris, Vienna, and then in Leipzig and Frankfurt. Things were made harder by the requirements we had: we wanted Persian actors who spoke Farsi without any accent, some of them had to be in their early 20s, and of course above all they had to be good actors. Then we needed three children aged between five and seven who also spoke without any accent. On top of that, the people had to be prepared to work on a film that criticises the regime. That automatically excluded anyone who wanted to go back to Iran. In the end we had a mix of professional and first-time actors. Some of the actors changed their names for security reasons. The most difficult thing was to direct them so that you don't notice their differences in backgrounds.

■ **Did you do any rehearsals? Did you tell them about your personal experience?**

We did some rehearsals but not too much. We talked a lot about the motivation of the characters and the interesting thing was that all of the actors felt very close to the subject matter of the film. Some were refugees themselves or the children of immigrants. The film was already a part of our lives and we all saw it as a manifesto of resistance and a tribute to the millions of refugees around the world.

■ **Where did you shoot most of the film? Did you shoot mostly in Turkey?**

We shot one month in Ankara, 2 weeks in the eastern Turkish mountains of Erzurum, 2 weeks in a studio in Vienna and one day in Berlin.

■



**"THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF REFUGEES COULD HARDLY BE DESCRIBED MORE POWERFULLY. INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES ARE MASTERFULLY INTERWOVEN (...) TO CREATE A MAGNIFICENT SUCCESS."**

**CINEMA**



"A POWERFUL FILM, WHICH BREATHES HOPE AND GRIPS THE AUDIENCE FROM THE VERY FIRST MOMENT. AN ABSOLUTE GEM: SENSITIVE AND OF HUGE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE."

FBW



## ON THE SUBJECT OF REFUGEES

### "More and more refugees worldwide" (\*)

**Geneva / London** – At the end of 2007 there were 11.4 million refugees around the world (not counting 4.6 million Palestinian refugees, who are helped by the UN organisation UNRWA) and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), people who have been driven from their homes by conflicts or persecution. This is the conclusion of the annual report of the United Nations refugee commission, the UNHCR, which was published on Tuesday.

Statistics for refugees around the world in 2007, compiled with data from 150 countries, reveal an increase in both groups with respect to 2006 (when there were 9.9 million refugees and 24.4 million IDPs).

"After a five-year decline in the number of refugees between 2001 and 2005, we have now seen two years of increases, and that's a concern. And we are now faced with a complex mix of global challenges that could threaten even more forced displacement in the future," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres as he presented the annual statistics. Guterres mentioned the new conflict-related emergencies, bad governance, scarce resources and extreme price hikes that have hit the poor the hardest and are generating instability in many places, warning that the situation could become even more critical.

The report indicates that the increase which has been noted is partly due to the situation in Iraq. At the end of 2007 there were 2.4 million IDPs there alone (at the beginning of 2007 the figure was 1.8 million). Somalia also records a steep increase, from 400,000 to a total of one million. However, the country with the highest number of IDPs is Colombia (up to 3 million). Among refugees, the report notes that Afghans form

the largest group (around 3 million), followed by Iraqis (around 2 million), Colombians (552,000), Sudanese (523,000) and Somalis (457,000).

In addition to refugees and internally displaced persons, the UNHCR statistics also encompass stateless people and asylum seekers, as well as returned refugees. The sum total of all people entitled to support from the UNHCR last year was 31.7 million.

The top refugee-hosting country in the world was Pakistan (2 million refugees). This was followed by Syria (1.5 million) Iran (964,000) Germany (579,000) and Jordan (500,000). Worldwide, last year there were 647,200 individual applications for asylum – a 5% increase on the previous year. This represented the first increase for five years. The main reason for this is the increasing number of Iraqis requesting asylum in Europe. Most applications for asylum were made in the USA, South Africa, Sweden, France, Great Britain, Canada and Greece.

The good news from the UNHCR report was that refugee resettlement referrals to third countries increased substantially in 2007. The UNHCR submitting 99,000 individuals who could not remain in their first country of refuge for consideration by other governments – the highest number in 15 years. Thus in the year 2007, 75,300 refugees – many from Burma, Burundi, Somalia, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan – were given new homes in third countries. After voluntary repatriation and integration in the asylum-giving land, referrals to third countries represented the third permanent solution for refugees.

Last year a total of 731,000 refugees returned to their home countries within the framework of aid programmes, mainly to Afghanistan (371,000) southern Sudan (131,700) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (60,000).

A number of stateless people declined last year to approximately 3 million. The main reason for this was a new law according to which about 2.6 million people in Nepal were given citizenship. The total number of stateless people throughout the world is estimated at approximately 12 million.

(\*) Published on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008



"A MASTERPIECE OF IRANIAN EXILE CINEMA."  
KULTURNEWS



## CAST

Ali.....	Navid AKHAVAN
Jasmin.....	Ezgi ASAROGLU
Grandmother.....	Soussan AZARIN
Azy.....	Elika BOZORGI
Lale.....	Behi DJANATI-ATAI
Manu.....	Fares FARES
Hassan.....	Payam MADJLESSI
Merdad.....	Pourya MAHYARI
Mother.....	Toufan MANOUTCHERI
Father.....	Michael NIAVARANI
Abbas.....	Said OVEISSI
Kian.....	Kamran RAD
Arman.....	Sina SABA
Mr. Pifko.....	Johannes SILBERSCHNEIDER

## CREW

Written and directed by...	Arash T. RIAHI
Producer.....	Veit HEIDUSCHKA
	Michael KATZ ( <i>Wega Film</i> )
	Margaret MENEGÖZ
	( <i>Les Films du Losange</i> )
Director of Photography..	Michi RIEBL aac
Editor.....	Karina RESSLER aea
Sound.....	Mohsan NASIRI
Music.....	KARUAN
Production Designer.....	Christoph KANTER
Costumes Designer.....	Monika BUTTINGER
Production Manager.....	Ulrike LÄSSER
Supervising Producer.....	Michael KATZ
Internationales Sales.....	LES FILMS DU LOSANGE



# ARASH T. RIAHI



© Stefan Olah

Born 1972 in Iran. Fled with his parents 1983 as political refugees to Vienna/Austria. Studied Film and the Arts, has been working as writer & director for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, the ORF, since 1995 on a freelance basis. Founded the film and media production company **"GOLDEN GIRLS FILM-PRODUKTION"** in 1998. Has written, directed and edited several award-winning short documentaries, shorts, experimental films, music videos and commercials. The cinema documentary **"THE SOUVENIRS OF MR. X"** in cooperation with ARTE and ORF was his first long documentary. Multi award winning **"EXILE FAMILY MOVIE"** was the second one. Finished in 2008 his first feature film **"FOR A MOMENT, FREEDOM"** produced by WEGA-Film and Les Films du Losange. The film has won 23 international awards since its premiere at the Montreal World Filmfestival end of August 2008. The film will be released in Austria, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, France, Canada, Switzerland, Czech Republic and Korea in 2009.

## ■ AWARDS (SELECTION):

Golden Zenith Montreal World Filmfestival 2008 for best First Feature Film • Best First Film, Zurich Filmfestival 2008 • Viennale 2008, best Austrian Film • Max Ophüls & Interfilm-Award for best documentary 2007 • FIPRESCI award for best Documentary at the 49<sup>th</sup> Leipzig International Filmfestival • Silver Hugo for best documentary at the Chicago International Filmfestival 2006 • best short Experimental Award Melbourne Filmfestival 2006 • Golden Dove for best animated Film Filmfestival Leipzig 2005 • Best Screenplay, 2<sup>nd</sup> San Luis Cine/Argentina • Best film & public award at 5<sup>th</sup> Amazonas Filmfestival/Brasil • Most surprising film Award at the 21<sup>st</sup> Odense Filmfestival 2006 • Best short Experimental Award Melbourne Filmfestival 2006 • Best Experimental film Award at Videoex 2006/Switzerland • Grand Diagonale Award for best Austrian Documentary 2006 • Golden Dove for best animated Film, Filmfestival Leipzig 2005 • Award for best script/Idea Filmfestival, Fantoche/Switzerland 2005 • Visual Pleasure Award/Animateka Festival/Ljubljana 2005 • Silver Plaque Award for best feature length documentary Chicago Filmfestival 2004 • Award for Innovative Cinema at the "Diagonale" – Austria 2001 • Golden Venus in the category "Best Austrian TV Ad" 2001 • ...

## ■ FILMOGRAPHY AND WORK LIST (SELECTION) FEATURE FILM

**For a moment, freedom** (2008, 110 min)

## CINEMA-DOCUMENTARIES

**Exile Family Movie** (1994–2006, 94 min)

**The Souvenirs of Mr. X** (2004, 100 min)

**Eclipsa-n-am ce face-Let the world end**

(1999, 90 min, Romania/Austria, directed together with Gerald Igor Hautzenberger & Raphael Barth)

## SHORT FILMS

**Mississippi** (Short Experimental, 2004)

**Reformel** (2001) **The impossibility** (2001)

**Anti-racism-Cinema spots** (1999)

**The boy & the strange reality** (1992, 8 min)

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**“RIAHI ACHIEVES A DOUBLE ARTISTIC SUCCESS, PRESENTING US WITH A MASTERPIECE OF IRANIAN EXILE CINEMA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME JETTISONING ALL NATIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BALLAST. HE FOCUSES ON THE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN DESIRE FOR FREEDOM AND SELF-DETERMINATION. A UNIVERSAL, CONTEMPORARY AND TIMELESS POLITICAL FILM JEWEL.”**

**KULTURNEWS**

No Animals were harmed during the making of this film!

