

Press Release

## Doha Film Institute announces recipients of first edition of its global film grants programme at 64<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival

- *20 up-and-coming filmmakers from around the world qualify for grants*
- *Grantees include projects from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and MENA*
- *396 applications received in total*
- *DFI grantee, 'History of Fear', the debut feature by Argentinian filmmaker, Benjamin Naishtat, to receive its world premiere in Berlinale Official Competition.*

**Berlin, Germany; February 8 2014:** Doha Film Institute today announced the recipients of its first global grants programme at the 64<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival. Among the 20 projects supported is Benjamin Naishtat's debut feature film, 'History of Fear', set to have its world premiere on Sunday (9<sup>th</sup> February) as part of the Berlinale Official Competition line-up.

Aimed at identifying new cinematic talent worldwide, with a focus on first- and second-time filmmakers, the fund received 396 applications for its first international cycle. The fund was previously open only to the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region.

Twenty projects from 24 countries will receive funding for development, production and post-production. The grantees encompass nine films from MENA, eight from the OCED's Development Assistance Committee list of countries (DAC), and three from the rest of the world.

They include highly anticipated projects by emerging talents from Argentina, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uruguay alongside projects from MENA countries including Algeria, Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia.

In total, the grants will support 12 narrative films, including two shorts (one fiction and one experimental), seven feature documentaries and one experimental documentary.

Applications were evaluated by an independent jury in December 2013 and were considered across three regional categories. The MENA region accounted for 200 of the total applications, followed by the DAC countries at 108, and 88 from the rest of the world.

While the fund has been expanded to include global filmmakers, emphasis remains on supporting filmmakers from the MENA region. Certain categories of funding are reserved exclusively for MENA filmmakers and a specific set of criteria for eligibility according to the nationality of the director has been implemented.

Abdulaziz Al Khater, Chief Executive Officer, Doha Film Institute, said: "The Doha Film Institute global grants were launched with a vision of fostering creative cultural exchange among MENA and international filmmakers. The strong response to the first submission cycle is a testament to the Institute's goal of supporting global storytelling and nurturing upcoming talent.

"We have seen tremendous success over the past three years with our MENA Grants programme, through which we have supported more than 130 projects. We are committed to the expansion of

our grants initiative to include talented filmmakers from all over the world. I welcome our newest grant recipients as they join DFI's growing international community of filmmakers."

On the selection of DFI grantee 'History of Fear' in Berlinale's Official Competition, Khalil Benkirane, Head of Grants, Doha Film Institute said: "Benjamin Naishtat's 'History of Fear' is an innovative project from an exciting new voice in world cinema. Our panel was deeply impressed with Naishtat's daring approach to his debut feature, which examines and reconstructs notions of fear, and creates a tense, quietly disturbing experience for the viewer. This powerful film from an emerging South American talent is a prime example of the type of cinema our global grants programme seeks to support."

Several filmmakers whose work has received funding from the Doha Film Institute have a presence in the Berlinale this year. Emir Baigazin, whose debut feature 'Harmony Lessons' won a Silver Bear last year, is on hand for the Co-Production Market with 'The Wounded Angel'. Short films by both Mahdi Fleifel and Ehab Tarabieh are in competition, while Imamaddin Hasanov, who received a production grant for his 'Holy Cow', participates in Berlinale Talents. Co-financed by DFI, Jasmila Zbanic's 'For Those Who Can Tell No Tales' is nominated for a Cinema for Peace Award.

Doha Film Institute will open applications for the next grant session from 1 to 21 April, 2014. Interested filmmakers from the MENA region can apply for feature documentaries and narratives at development, production, and post-production stages. Short films can be submitted at production and post-production stages.

Applicants from the DAC can submit feature projects at production and post-production stages; while documentaries from DAC and any features from the rest of the world will be considered by invitation only.

Grantees for the Fall 2013 session are:

#### **FEATURE NARRATIVE - DEVELOPMENT**

##### **Men in the Sun directed by Mahdi Fleifel (Palestine/United Kingdom/Greece/Denmark/Qatar)**

Synopsis: 'Men in the Sun' is the tragicomic story of Qassim and Abu Love, two Palestinian friends who escape a refugee camp in Lebanon in search of a better future in Europe. After a journey fraught with danger, they arrive in Athens and make contact with Shadi, Abu Love's cousin, who has been in Athens for years and knows his way around. After promising them a way out of Greece, Shadi disappears with their money instead, leaving Qassim and Abu Love to face a desperate fight for survival in a country that is undergoing economic and social collapse.

##### **The Returning directed by Ehab Tarabieh (Syria/Qatar)**

Synopsis: After spending 45 years as a smuggler on the border, war and old age force Mustafa down from the mountains and back to his hometown in the occupied Golan Heights. Living in his childhood home, he investigates the secrets he left behind when he fled 45 years ago – the secrets still seeping through homes, into the streets, through the roots of the trees and up the mountain. Assuming he is invincible, and that he knows his way around these secrets and through the night, unheard and unseen, he crosses forbidden lines – and will have to suffer the consequences.

#### **FEATURE NARRATIVE - PRODUCTION**

##### **Burning Birds directed by Sanjeeva Pushpakumara (Sri Lanka/France/Qatar)**

Synopsis: 1989. A small village in eastern Sri Lanka. After her husband is abducted, tortured and murdered by state army, Kusum must fight to look after her eight children and mother-in-law all by herself. After being physically and sexually abused, and working a number of odd jobs, Kusum falls into prostitution. The police arrest her while she is working in a brothel. Soon the news spread throughout the village and her family's fate is turned upside down...

**By The Time It Gets Dark directed by Anocha Suwichakornpong (Thailand/Qatar)**

Synopsis: 'By the Time It Gets Dark' tells the interwoven stories of several characters: a film director and her muse; a waitress who keeps changing jobs; an actor; and an actress. Their lives are loosely connected by almost invisible threads. The narrative sheds its skin several times over the course of the film, to reveal layer upon layer of the complexities that make up our lives.

**Hedi directed by Mohamed Ben Attia (Tunisia/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Hedi is a simple young man. He is not very talkative or reactive and does not expect much from the life that is traced for him. Indifferent to everything around him, he just takes life as it comes. He allows his authoritarian and overwhelming mother to organise his marriage to Khedija; lets his boss send him on a prospecting trip to Mahdia during the week of his wedding celebrations. In Mahdia, he meets Reem, who works as an activity leader in a seaside resort hotel that is losing its tourists. Intrigued by her insouciance and frivolity, Hedi gets involved in a passionate love relationship. Meanwhile, as the wedding preparations are going on, Hedi is finally forced to make a choice.

**House Without Roof directed by Soleen Yusef (Iraq/Germany/Qatar)**

Synopsis: 'House Without Roof' tells the journey of Alan, Jan and Liya, three siblings born in the Kurdish part of Iraq who grew up in Germany. The three must fulfill the last wishes of their late mother and bury her in their Kurdish home village next to their father, who fell in the battle against the regime of Saddam Hussein. On their nervewracking Kurdistan odyssey, they are not just confronted by their large Kurdish family, who do not want their mother to be buried next to her husband, but also by each other, since they have been emotionally separated over time. In their personal journeys, searching for homeland, identity and the road to that knowledge, they laugh, fight, lose their mother's coffin, hurt each other and cry – but at last they achieve their aim and come closer together as a family.

**Lamb directed by Yared Zeleke (Ethiopia/Qatar)**

Synopsis: 'Lamb' is a coming-of-age drama about nine-year-old Ephraim and his constant companion, a sheep named Chuni, in Ethiopia. Ephraim's affection for Chuni deepened after he lost his mother to famine a year ago. Consequently, his beloved father sends him and Chuni far away from their drought-stricken homeland to live with distant relatives in a greener part of the country. Ephraim soon finds himself to be a homesick outcast who is always getting into trouble. When his uncle orders him to slaughter Chuni for the upcoming holiday feast, Ephraim devises a devious scheme to save the sheep and return to his home.

**Land directed by Babak Jalali (United Kingdom/Italy/France/Qatar)**

Synopsis: The Yellow Eagle family belongs to the Lakota Sioux tribe and lives on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. News reaches them that Floyd, the youngest son, has died during military service in Afghanistan. So begins the wait for his body to be returned to the reservation for burial. Wesley, the

youngest surviving son, is an alcoholic. His brother's death doesn't really hit him, as his only aim during the day is to get hold of beer. Wesley is in daily contact with the white people who run the liquor stores just off the reservation. This already uneasy relationship becomes unpleasant when acts of violence occur and Wesley is directly affected. Meanwhile, the eldest son, Raymond, is a recovering alcoholic with a wife and two sons. He is withdrawn and keeps his worries to himself. Although he feels a sense of responsibility for the extended family, he seems to feel too emasculated to do anything about it – until the troubles that have affected his brothers force him to stand up and be a man again.

**Mountain directed by João Salaviza (Portugal/France/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Day breaks on the eighth floor in a suburban neighbourhood of Lisbon and 14-year-old Bruno's grandfather is still in hospital. Doctors give him only a few days to live. The imminence of his death and the void that will be left forces Bruno to become the man of the house, where he lives with his mother Monica, who is in her 30s, and his three-year-old sister Erica.

**The Wounded Angel directed by Emir Baigazin (Kazakhstan/Russia/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Four loosely connected stories set in a small town in Kazakhstan at the beginning of the 90s, a time of transition from the Soviet era to a new state inscribed with emotional and economic depression. Each of the four main characters, all of whom are 13 years old, must go through a painful transition themselves; this presents them with a moral dilemma. They turn from being children – or 'angels' – to grown-ups, and are wounded along the way.

**FEATURE NARRATIVE - POST-PRODUCTION**

**History Of Fear directed by Benjamin Naishtat (Argentina/Uruguay/Germany/France/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Pola spends his days trimming grass and taking care of a football court in a gated community in the outer suburbs of Buenos Aires, not far from where the urban landscape gives way to wilderness. He despises the people he works for, yet adores the hypocritical way in which the inhabitants treat him with respectful indulgence. Furthermore, he loathes the people who have started setting up some sort of camp in the nearby wasteland, believing they have come to steal and ruin the peaceful environment of the community.

**FEATURE DOCUMENTARY - PRODUCTION**

**Holy Cow directed by Imamaddin Hasanov (Azerbaijan/Germany/Qatar)**

Synopsis: In the Caucasus Mountains, one can find one of the most beautiful and ancient settlements in Azerbaijan: the village of Lahyc. Here, time stands still; ancient traditions are still preserved. In this conservative Muslim community lives Tapdyq and he has a dream: to buy a cow from Europe to improve living conditions for his poor family. He finds out that a European cow can provide up to 40 litres of milk per day – four times more than a local cow. But his wife won't allow it – she is jealous. The Old Men rule the village and they don't want such a cow, because its milk is full of chemicals and harmful for them. This creates a dramatic tension in the community, with conflicts that lead to hilarious situations. 'Holy Cow' is about the confrontation of two cultures and world outlooks; about innovation and the old ways; about evolution, change and the freedom of the human spirit.

**Memory Exercises directed by Paz Encina (Paraguay/Argentina/Qatar)**

**Synopsis:** Between 1954 and 1989, Paraguay suffered one of the longest dictatorships in Latin America: 35 years of repression, silence, torture, exile, fear and disappearing. To remember that era would be a determining factor for the future of the country. It would mean an end to the system of corruption. Memory is the only thing that might save the Paraguayan people. 'Memory Exercises' is a documentary film about the story of people who need to remember specific moments – to recollect everything. It is also the story of a childhood in exile and the always-present question of returning to one's homeland.

**Sidi Amar directed by Mohamed Ouzine (Algeria/France/Qatar)**

**Synopsis:** It is a small cemetery, bordering the valley that separates Algeria from Morocco. It is called the cemetery of Sidi Amar, because it is where the marabout has been laid to rest in some miserable barrack, in the form of a mausoleum. It is here that he perished at the beginning of the 20th century. He was smart, this Sidi Amar: as his final resting place, he chose a true paradise, with a view on the foothills of the Atlas Mountains on one side, and fantastic arid hills on the other. I think that this is the least he deserves, for he has become the confidant of the population of a whole territory: regularly, families come to ask him to intercede in their favour, such that one woman may find a husband, or a man might succeed in the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean.

**The Siren Of Faso Fani directed by Michel K. Zongo (Burkina Faso/France/Qatar)**

**Synopsis:** Through the eyes of former workers at the once-famous cotton factory in Burkina Faso, 'The Siren of Faso Fani' explores the disastrous consequences of global economic policies that are blind to local realities. The shutdown of the factory in 2001 put hundreds out of work, plunged thousands into poverty and left an entire city reeling: Koudougou, where I was born 40 years ago. A decade after this economic and social disaster, I return to a city that is now a shadow of its former self, and to the silent factory that was so central to my childhood. But most of all I come to see the workers. Stripped of their livelihood and of their pride, they remain convinced that reviving the cotton industry can offer a viable future for the whole community.

**The Stopover directed by Laurent Aït Benalla (Morocco/France/Qatar)**

**Synopsis:** Boats from all over the world enter the port of Sète, in the south of France, to stop over for a few days, or a few hours. Meanwhile, their cargo is taken care of by the dockworkers, while Moroccan sailors are on standby to discover the fate that awaits them, almost two years after the seizure of their boats. Observed from the quays, during a stopover intended to load or to unload passengers like thousands of cars, mountains of coal or hundreds of cows, this composite space, often kept out of sight, reveals human trajectories and economic struggles.

**FEATURE DOCUMENTARY - POST-PRODUCTION**

**Where Were You (During the US Invasion of Panama)? directed by Abner Benaim (Panama/Argentina/Qatar)**

**Synopsis:** On the night of 20 December, 1989, the USA launched a massive invasion of otherwise peaceful Panama. George Bush made it clear he wanted General Noriega – an ex-CIA friend turned rogue – out of power. The Panama Canal, a strategic asset for the USA, seemed to be at risk. For two weeks, Panama's tropical backdrop became the testing ground for new weapons. Noriega handed himself over and was convicted for drug trafficking and jailed in the States, and later served another sentence in France. 'Where Were You?' is a documentary portrait of the collective memory of a country and its people through characters whose lives were greatly shaken by the invasion; each of them takes us on a journey through their past and present.

## SHORT NARRATIVE – PRODUCTION

### **The Servants directed by Marwan Khneisser (Lebanon/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Nabil is the guard of an old villa located by the mouth of a river. Sayed Walid, an influential lord, and his friends come to the villa for a day of partying and debauchery. Nabil's son, Moussa, befriends Zaher, a guest's son, and together they get away from the party to go swimming. But Nabil and Sayed Walid's common past soon re-emerges and tragically comes to disrupt the day's enjoyment.

## EXPERIMENTAL AND ESSAY – PRODUCTION / POST-PRODUCTION

### **Beirut Of The Balkans directed by Nicolas Khoury (Lebanon/Qatar)**

Synopsis: Sarajevo has gone through historical stages that parallel those of Beirut: the old town, the hell city, the ghost town and the new city. This film highlights the similar phases the two cities have lived through before and during the Lebanese Civil War and the Bosnian War, via the citizens of Sarajevo and the Lebanese people who live there, in order to underline the current relationship between the citizens and their new city rebuilt. Like Beirut, Sarajevo after the war is a city that has started from zero, not only in its material and visual appearance, but also in restoring its relationship with its population, who now have a new vision of their city.

### **Off Frame directed by Mohanad Yaqubi (Palestine/France/Qatar)**

Synopsis: What is left today from the Palestinian revolution are some images and sounds, pieces of film scattered around the world and preserved in tins categorised by other people. These films record the life of people who are no longer on Earth; places that have changed; a history that doesn't have a place in memory. 'Off Frame' narrates the story of Palestinian revolutionary cinema by following the life of the Palestine Film Unit, a film group that was established in 1968 and that developed with the revolution until the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982.

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### **Notes to Editor**

For more information about eligibility and submission process for DFI's grants programme, visit:  
<http://www.dohafilminstitute.com/financing/grants/guidelines>

### **About Doha Film Institute:**

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation established in 2010. It organically supports the growth of the local film community by enhancing industry knowledge, cultivating film appreciation and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. Doha Film Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films, educational programmes, film screenings, the Ajyal Youth Film Festival and the Qumra Doha Film Festival.

With culture, community, education and entertainment at its foundation, the Doha Film Institute serves as an all-encompassing film hub in Doha, as well as a resource for the region and the rest of the world. Doha Film Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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**For more information on Doha Film Institute, please contact:**

Hanaa Issa  
Doha Film Institute  
+974 44200628  
[hissa@dohafilminstitute.com](mailto:hissa@dohafilminstitute.com)

**MENA Press Enquiries:**

Kelly Home / Nivine William / Divya Khanna  
ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller  
+9714 4507 600  
[kelly.home@bm.com](mailto:kelly.home@bm.com) / [Nivine.william@bm.com](mailto:Nivine.william@bm.com) / [Divya.khanna@bm.com](mailto:Divya.khanna@bm.com)

**International Press Enquiries:**

Cathy Dunkley  
Freuds  
+44 203 003 6355  
[cathy.dunkley@freuds.com](mailto:cathy.dunkley@freuds.com)