Human Rights Watch World Report 2001
This report reviews human rights practices in seventy countries and describes events from November 1999 through October 2000.
Online version is available at: http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/
Copyright © 2001 Human Rights Watch

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The Human Rights Watch International Film Festival was created in 1988 to advance public education on human rights issues and concerns using the unique medium of film. Each year, the festival exhibits the finest films and videos with human rights themes in theaters and on cable television throughout the United States and elsewhere—a reflection of both the scope of the festival and its increasing global appeal. The 2000 festival featured thirty films (twenty-two of which were premieres), from twelve countries. The festival included feature-length fiction films, documentaries, and animation. In 2000, selections from the festival were presented in four countries and within the U.S. selected films showcased in ten cities.

In selecting films for the festival, Human Rights Watch concentrates equally on artistic merit and human rights content. The festival encourages filmmakers around the world to address human rights subject matter in their work and presents films and videos from both new and established international filmmakers. Each year, the festival’s programming committee screens more than 500 films and videos to create a program that represents a range of countries and issues. Once a film is nominated for a place in the program, staff of the relevant division of Human Rights Watch also view the work to confirm its accuracy in the portrayal of human rights concerns. Though the festival rules out films that contain unacceptable inaccuracies of fact, we do not bar any films on the basis of a particular point of view.

The 2000 festival was first presented over a two-week period in New York, as a collaborative venture with the Film Society of Lincoln Center, and then selection from the festival were presented at the Northwest Film Center in Portland, Oregon and several other cities throughout the U.S. The 2000 festival reached out to a broader audience by co-presenting selected films with five important New York festivals (the African Film Festival, the Margaret Mead Film Festival, and the New York Latino Film Festival, The New Festival/New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, the Urban World Film Festival) and several independent media organizations (the Educational Video Center, Free Speech TV, Paper Tiger TV and POV/The American Documentary). A majority of the screenings were followed by discussions with the filmmakers, media activists, and Human Rights Watch staff on the issues represented in each work.

Two documentaries featured in this year’s festival had dramatic effects in their countries of origin. Following the recent theatrical release and television airing of Irit Gal’s documentary Harmed Forces, the Israeli Parliament re-categorized Israeli Defense Force veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as “military disabled” rather than “mentally ill,” which enabled these veterans to receive Israeli disability benefits and Social Security Insurance. “Harmed Forces” is an intimate documentary portrait of two former Israeli soldiers who still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder following their military service in Israel’s 1982 campaign in Lebanon. The Argentine documentary Spoils of War, which chronicles the ongoing
courageous efforts of the “Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo” from the early 1970s until today, helped several families reunite with relatives who were “disappeared” during that country’s dirty war.

The 2000 opening night celebration presented the New York premiere of the screen adaptation of Anna Deveare Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles*, her one-woman/multi-voiced portrait of the violence triggered in Los Angeles by the acquittal in 1992 of four police officers in the beating of Rodney King. Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Marc Levin directed Smith’s tour-de-force performance.

As part of the opening night program, the festival annually awards a prize in the name of cinematographer and director Nestor Almendros, who was also a cherished friend of the festival and Human Rights Watch. The award, which includes a cash prize of U.S. $5,000 goes to a deserving and courageous filmmaker in recognition of his or her contributions to human rights through film. The 2000 festival awarded the Nestor Almendros Prizes to Randa Chahal Sabbag, for her stunning feature debut, *A Civilized People* (*Civilisees*).

The film is a tragicomic story of the experiences of a diverse group of characters during the Lebanese civil war. Currently, the Lebanese government has asked Chahal Sabbag to cut forty-seven minutes of this film, claiming that these sections are offensive and inflammatory. Chahal Sabbag refuses to cut (re-edit) her film and to date the film has still not been allowed to screen in Lebanon.

In 1995, in honor of Irene Diamond, a longtime board member and supporter of Human Rights Watch, the festival launched the Irene Diamond Lifetime Achievement award, which is presented annually to a director whose life’s work demonstrates an outstanding commitment to human rights and film. Previous recipients have included Costa Gavras, Ousmane Sembene, Barbara Kopple, and Alan J. Pakula. This year, the award was presented to American filmmaker Frederick Wiseman. Wiseman, one of the greatest living documentary filmmakers, has created an exceptional body of work consisting of thirty full-length films devoted primarily to exploring American institutions—from the armed services to hospitals, from welfare to the high school system, from public parks to whole cities and public housing projects. Wiseman is an unflinchingly honest filmmaker, who has repeatedly stared down painful truths that many artists either can not or will not address. Throughout his work, Wiseman has told the story of his country’s idiosyncracies, flaws, strengths, and tragedies.

Highlights of the 2000 festival included two films dealing with the plight of those “disappeared” under Argentina’s military dictatorship: David Blaustein’s extraordinary documentary *Spoils of War*, which we described in the preceding pages, and *Garage Olimpo*, the dramatic feature by formerly exiled Argentinean Marco Bechis. *Garage Olimpo* tells the story of a young woman kidnapped and tortured in a clandestine Buenos Aires prison and her efforts to survive no matter what the costs. Other highlights included, *Made in the YoUth S.A.* and *ICC: A Call for Justice*, two short films conceived and produced by youth producers in consultation with Human Rights Watch. Both short video had their world premieres at this year’s festival and played to sold-out audiences. This year’s closing night screening included the New York premiere of Jens Meruer’s *Public Enemy*, a fascinating look at the Black Panther movement through the recollections of four of its most outspoken members: co-founder Bobby Seale, law professor Kathleen Cleaver (the highest ranking female Panther), prisoner-turned-playwright Jamal Joseph, and musician and record producer Nile Rodgers.

Each year the festival holds a series of special film screenings for high school students and their teachers in an effort to encourage dialogue about human rights in the classroom. Daytime screenings are followed
by discussions among the students, their teachers, visiting filmmakers, and Human Rights Watch staff. In 2000, the program included a special collaborative screening of short films from Africa with the New York African Film Festival.

In 1996, the festival expanded to London. The 2000 London festival produced with the Ritzy Theater in Brixton showcased the United Kingdom premiere of David O. Russell’s *Three Kings*, an ironic and powerful drama about the involvement of United States soldiers in the Gulf War.

The festival overall was extremely successful with a timely screening of *A Cry from the Grave*, about the massacre in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in July 1995 and the major effort by the International War Crimes Tribunal to find and prosecute the perpetrators. The festival closed with a special screening of Norman Jewison’s *The Hurricane*, starring Academy Award winner Danzel Washington as Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, a man wrongly accused and sentenced to three life terms of imprisonment.

In a further effort to expand the festival’s scope, the Global Showcase, a selected package of traveling films from the festival, was created in 1994. The Global Showcase is presented annually in a growing number of sites and cities around the world. The 2000 showcase traveled internationally to Sydney and Melbourne, Australia; Lodz, Poland; Cairo, Egypt; and Beirut, Lebanon. In the United States the showcase has been presented in Houston, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Boulder, Colorado; Amherst, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; Salt Lake City, Utah; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Rochester, New York. The traveling festival plans extensive expansion in Boston, Massachusetts and San Francisco, California in January of 2001.