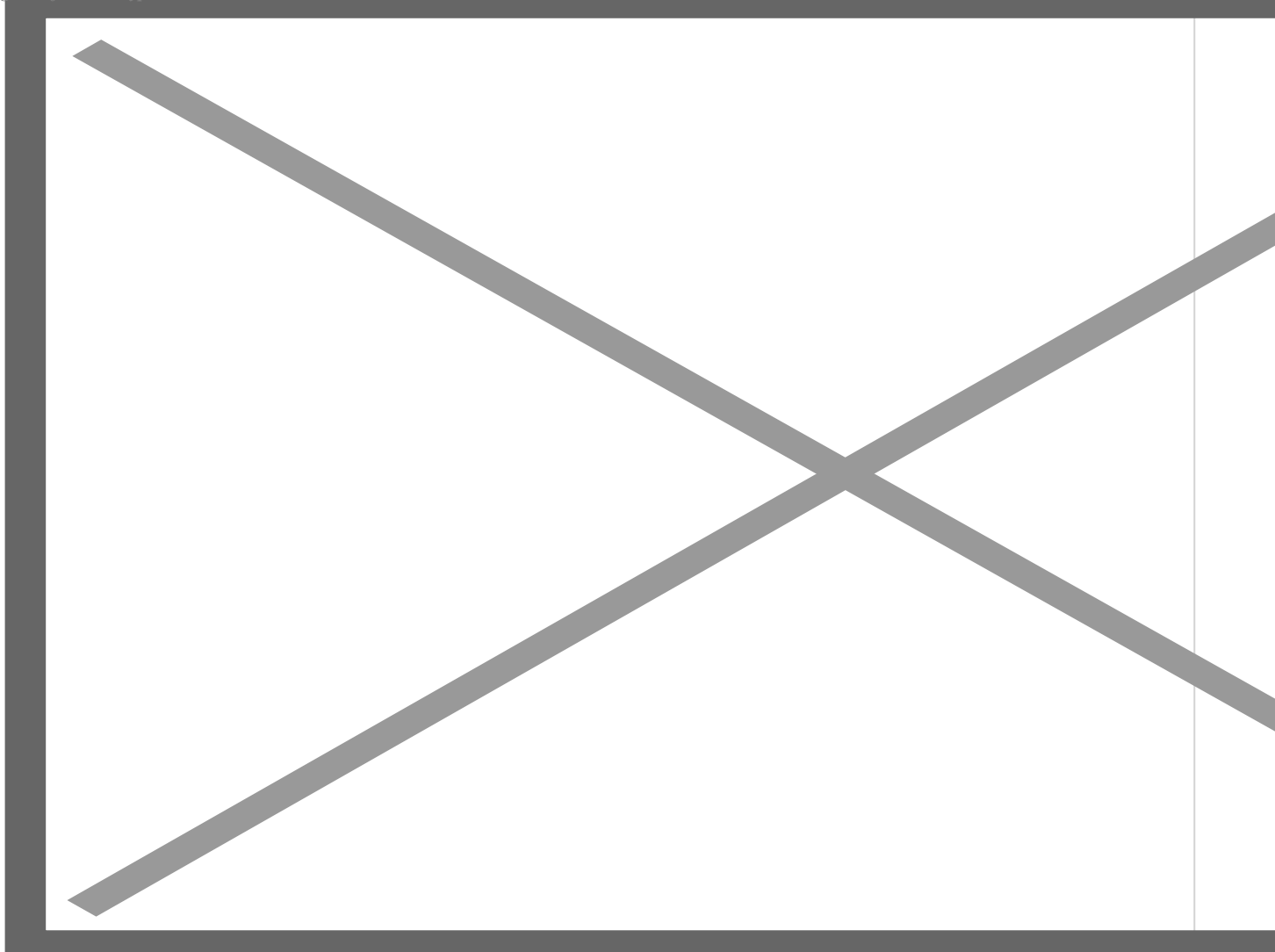


Filmmakers pull films from Amsterdam festival after organizers condemned pro- Palestine protest

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A placard on a column advertising the 36th edition of the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), November 8–19, 2023. (Photo by Alamy)

Amsterdam, November 22 (RHC)-- Over a dozen filmmakers have pulled out of the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) after the organizers condemned the use of the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" at an opening-night protest.

Earlier this month, at the start of the world's largest documentary festival, during a speech by the IDFA director Orwa Nyrabia, three activists took to the stage holding a sign with the slogan which is perceived by some as a call to promote the eradication of Israel.

On November 10, the IDFA, which ran until November 19, condemned the use of the slogan in a statement. "Our mission and our intentions are the opposite of hurting anybody or making them feel unsafe. That slogan does not represent us, and we do not endorse it in any way. We are truly sorry that it was hurtful to many," the statement read.

It also released another statement two days later further clarifying their stance on the slogan. "We understand that the slogan that is at the heart of the ongoing discussion is used by various parties in different ways and is perceived by various people in various manners. We are not ignoring, undermining nor criminalizing any of these positions and we fully respect and acknowledge the pain that is going around and the extreme urgency of these discussions while war is still on, and innocent civilians are still dying," it said.

The statement prompted protests from the Palestine Film Institute (PFI), a national body responsible for promoting the cinema of Palestine, which criticized the festival organizers' reproaches.

Following the controversies, at least 20 filmmakers attending the festival followed the PFI's call to withdraw their films, including Basma al-Sharif, a juror of the festival's experimental "Envision" competition.

Sharif, whose parents were born in Palestine, said "from the river to the sea" was an anti-apartheid slogan advocating a state in which people of all faiths had equal rights, and that, by denouncing it, the IDFA had aligned itself with the Israeli government's "aggressive propaganda."

Before the film festival issued its statement, 16 figures linked to the Israeli film industry had signed an open letter expressing their "utmost dismay, disappointment, and concern" at the onstage protest and the positive pro-Palestinian reception at the festival.

The slogan "From the river to the sea" is a reference to the land between the Jordan River, which borders the West Bank, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, where the Gaza Strip is located.

Israel launched the war on Gaza after the Palestinian territory's resistance groups carried out Operation al-Aqsa Storm against the Zionist occupant forces on October 7 in response to the regime's decades-long intensified crimes against the Palestinian people.

Palestinian medical authorities say more than 13,000 people, including over 5,500 children, have so far been killed, and about 30,000 people have been injured.

While pro-Palestine rallies see crackdown in some countries, Israel's relentless bombing of the besieged Gaza Strip has outraged people across the world, triggering mass protests and a call for an immediate ceasefire.

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