



## Press Release

# Arab talent and positivity of youth highlighted with colourful opening gala of 'The Idol' at third Ajyal Youth Film Festival

- *Director Hany-Abu Assad and Arab Idol winner Mohammed Assaf join bevy of celebrities on red carpet*
- *80 films from 36 countries being screened until December 5 at Katara*
- *Ajyal celebrates extraordinary talent emerging in Qatar with two special 'Made in Qatar' programmes, says Fatma Al Remaihi*

**Doha, Qatar; November 29, 2015:** Putting the spotlight on young Arab talent and highlighting its commitment to promoting the next generation of filmmakers, the third Ajyal Youth Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, marked a colourful start at Katara. Until Dec. 5, the festival will host the screening of 80 films from 36 countries including a showcase of 17 films 'Made in Qatar.'

The third Ajyal Youth Film Festival flagged off with the Middle East and North Africa premiere of ***The Idol*** (Palestine, UK, Qatar, The Netherlands; 2015), directed by Academy Award-nominated Hany Abu-Assad, bringing the inspiring life story of 'Arab Idol' champion Mohammed Assaf to the big screen.

The opening red carpet gala welcomed Hany Abu-Assad, Mohammed Assaf, the film's producers Ali Jafaar and Amira Diab, cinematographer Ehab Assal and a range of acclaimed filmmakers and local and regional celebrities.

The Ajyal Film Competition's 520 young jurors also participated in the opening ceremony at the Katara Opera House. Over the week, they will watch and analyse a dynamic programme of films under three competitive sections – Mohaq, Hilal, and Bader – followed by discussions and events including panels, workshops and Q&A sessions with filmmakers.

## **Developing Creativity of the Next Generation**

At the opening ceremony, His Excellency Dr. Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari, Minister of Culture, Arts & Heritage, said: "Ajyal Youth Film Festival is an initiative that brings great value to our community. It was created to bring people of different generations together through cinema and the first two editions have made a positive impact on the lives of many people. Telling our stories through film allows us to connect as a community, to share our perspectives and to generate cultural dialogue within our society. Ajyal gives great importance to developing the creativity of the next generation."

Fatma Al Remaihi, Festival Director and CEO of the Doha Film Institute, added: "This year, we pay tribute to the 120-year history of cinema. While the changes over the years have been vast and groundbreaking, here we are - still coming together in a dark room with a big screen for the perfect cinematic experience. Over the next seven days, we will make our own history through the films of Ajyal. Audiences young and old will experience films that will delight, inspire, entertain and move them."

She added: "Alongside a dynamic selection of the best films from around the world, the Ajyal Youth Film Festival also celebrates the extraordinary talent emerging in Qatar with two special programmes of films in the Made in Qatar section. Our film screenings as well as a range of special



events, exhibitions, digital installations, outdoor screenings live performances, panels and family weekend activities defines Ajyal as a truly community oriented event that also nurtures the next generation of talent.”

Doha Film Institute Chief Administrative Officer Abdulla Al Mosallam said: “Over the past two editions we have welcomed hundreds of young jurors, screened countless films, welcomed filmmakers and stars from all corners of the globe and brought memorable cinematic experiences to audiences young and old. The focus of Ajyal is films for and about young people but our programme has something for cinema lovers of all ages.”

### **Youth and positivity**

Earlier, addressing a press conference to introduce *The Idol*, Fatma Al Remailhi said: “Hany Abu-Assad is one of the most distinctive filmmakers from the Arab world and we are honoured to open our festival with the regional premiere of this captivating and accomplished film, which epitomizes optimism and youthful energy.

“The Doha Film Institute has been involved right from its production stage as a co-financier of the project. Mohammed Assaf’s incredible story in the hands of a great filmmaker like Hany Abu-Assad is a winning combination. Ajyal is dedicated to inspiring our younger generation, to open them up to new perspectives on the world around them and encourage their creativity. The Idol is thus a perfect film that embodies hope and positivity for our youth.”

Hany Abu-Assad said: “The most difficult obstacle in making the film was to adapt reality into drama that would resonate with audiences. Even though Palestinians in Gaza are living in a very difficult situation and there is destruction all over the Arab region, which is traumatising and shocking, they still go to work, school and they live everyday life with love and humanity which transcends every ugliness and darkness, Gaza is inspirational for humanity because despite all their troubles they have not lost their humanity.”

Mohammed Assaf said: “Seeing my story personally was amazing – more importantly the story carried many aspects – not just about my life but about the difficulties and plight of Palestinians in Gaza. It’s a story of hope and is inspirational for young people not just in Palestine but for Arab youth. It teaches us to persevere, have hope and to realise our dreams; the film is a story of positivity that the people of Gaza have not given up hope despite the suffering.”

A producer of the film Amira Diab added: “It was very important for Hany to have the children in Gaza in the movie. They have their own energy and presence, they are self confident. The children in the film have witnessed two wars in their lives and so they are fearless and very confident and we wanted to convey that.”

The third annual Ajyal Youth Film Festival consists of daily public screenings of local and international films; the popular ‘Made in Qatar’ section dedicated to showcasing home-grown talent from Qatar; SONY Cinema Under the Stars; family weekend; the Doha Giffoni Youth Media Summit; special events and exhibitions; the Sandbox interactive digital playground; school screenings; and the Ajyal Competition.

The Ajyal Katara Main Box Office will be open from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM until December 5th. The Ajyal FNAC Ticket Outlet will be open until December 5th from 2:00 PM till 9:00 PM. Tickets can also be purchased securely online through the Festival’s website at [ajyalfilm.com](http://ajyalfilm.com).



Tickets are priced at QR 25 for regular screenings, and QR 40 for premium screenings (including the opening and closing night films). QM Culture Pass members get a discount of QR 5 on all regularly priced Festival screenings and events when they present their QM Culture Pass at any Festival ticket outlet. Pass holders can purchase up to two discounted tickets per screening.

For more information on the movie timings and the Ajyal Youth Film Festival, log onto [www.dohafilminstitute.com](http://www.dohafilminstitute.com).

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**About Doha Film Institute:**

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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