



la Biennale di Venezia / 71st Venice International Film Festival

Two “empty chairs” on the Jury of Venice 71 for Iranian director Mahnaz Mohammadi and for Ukrainian director Oleg Sentsov

There will be two chairs standing symbolically empty among those of the international **Jury of Venice 71**, and they will be for Iranian director and actress **Mahnaz Mohammadi** and for Ukrainian director **Oleg Sentsov**, both of whom are now being held in prison, the former in Iran, the latter in Russia. The **Jury of Venice 71**, chaired by **Alexandre Desplat**, will award the **Golden Lion** for Best Film and the other official prizes of the **71st Venice International Film Festival** (27 August – 6 September 2014).

Iranian director **Mahnaz Mohammadi**, who has been fighting for years for women’s rights in her country, was arrested by local authorities on June 7th 2014 for the fourth time since 2007. The director was condemned to five years in prison for endangering national security and for spreading propaganda against the Iranian government.

The french Film Directors’ Guild (SRF) has promoted a petition signed by hundreds of filmmakers around the world, including Asghar Farhadi, Xavier Dolan, William Friedkin, Céline Sciamma, and many festivals and associations of cinema. They have called attention to the situation of the young artist – who denies all the accusations – which is similar to that of her countryman director Jafar Panahi, winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 2000.

Ukrainian director **Oleg Sentsov** was arrested on May 11th by the Russian intelligence services, and accused of terrorist acts, which he claims he has nothing to do with. The director was taken to Moscow, where he is now being held pending trial. Despite a petition promoted by the European Film Academy and signed by 20 directors including Pedro Almodovar, Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Roberto Benigni, he was denied bail and will remain in prison through October, when his trial begins. He risks a 20-year sentence. The director openly opposed the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

The chairs of these two jury members will remain empty during the Jury meetings for the duration of the Venice Film Festival, to symbolize their absence and the solidarity which the Venice Film Festival wishes to express to them.

Mahnaz Mohammadi was born in Iran in 1975 and directed her first documentary – *Women Without Shadows* – in 2003, focusing from the very start on the condition of women in her country, and winning many international awards. She later directed other documentaries, including the award-winning *Travelogue* (2006), filmed entirely on the train that connects Teheran to Ankara. After this film, the authorities prohibited Mohammadi from leaving the country, but they were unable to stop the artist from working. She starred in the film by Reza Serkanian *The Momentary Marriage* (2011), presented at Cannes, and contributed to the documentary *We Are Half of Iran's Population* (2009) by director Rakhshan Banietemad, who will be presenting her film *Ghesseha (Tales)* in Competition this year.

Oleg Sentsov was born in 1976 in Simferopol, in the Crimean peninsula. After studying filmmaking and screenwriting in Moscow, he made his debut in 2008 with the short film *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, followed the year after by *The Horn of a Bull*. His first feature-length film was *Gaamer*, which made its debut in 2012 at the Rotterdam Film Festival before going on to be screened at various international film festivals and winning the FIPRESCI award at Odessa and the Russian Guild of Film Critics' Award at the IDFF Spirit of Fire. Before his arrest, Sentsov was working on his second film, *Rhino*.

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For further information

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