



PROACTION FILM AND VENTANA FILMS PRESENT

RETURN TO HOMS



SCREENING TOOLKIT

GUIDE FOR OPENING REMARKS AND LEADING POST-FILM DISCUSSIONS

TALKING POINTS FOR YOUR OPENING REMARKS:

1. Introduce Yourself.
2. Welcome everyone and thank them for attending.
3. Provide context about the movie and why you chose to host a screening.
4. Briefly recognize any local sponsors.
5. Encourage people to drop a business card at the registration table so we can stay in touch.
6. Invite people to join in conversation or Q&A after the movie.

SAMPLE REMARKS:

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the (add city or town) screening of RETURN TO HOMS. My name is _____ and I am with (name of your organization if you belong to one).

You're in for a treat tonight. RETURN TO HOMS is an incredible film that is traveling all over the world. It's been seen in theaters like this one and by thousands of people so far!

RETURN TO HOMS follows nineteen-year-old goalkeeper-turned-insurgent, Abdul Basset, as he and a rag-tag group of comrades fight to protect the captive inhabitants of the besieged city of Homs. As one of the unlikely leaders of the Syrian rebellion Basset has become something of a totemic figure, with Le Monde labelling him an 'icon of the revolution'. His protest songs and dark sense of humour reflect his dream of peaceful liberation from Assad's oppressive regime, but

when their hopeful uprising is met with violent resistance by government forces, he and his companions take up arms. Trailing the fearless crew over a two-year period, this remarkable film sees the city Basset once knew and loved, deserted and torn apart beyond recognition. As audacious hope turns to despair, Derki presents the real desperation behind the bloodied faces and waving rifles that have become Syria's refrain.

I chose to captain this screening because _____ (I wanted to spread a more nuanced view of the Syrian conflict than is available through mainstream media / I was moved by the human stories so often forgotten about in political upheavals / I admired the courage of the filmmakers in bringing the inside track of the revolution to broader public attention). I'd like to thank some friends of mine who helped us get the movie over the hump in terms of ticket sales. These are organizations that believe in the mission of RETURN TO HOMS. (Briefly recognize your sponsors).

Finally, when the ending credits roll, we'll turn up the house lights and have a conversation about the movie and answer any questions you have. Be sure to stick around! And now, let's watch RETURN TO HOMS!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

As answered by producer, Orwa Nyrabia – April 10, 2014

Where is Basset Now?

Basset went into be-sieged Homs as you see in the 'Return to Homs', and he is still there. He later lost even more of his loved ones, and many of his comrades were killed while trying to break out of the siege and bring in wheat. The living conditions are extreme, and there is a huge shortage of food and medical supplies, but he still sends out YouTube messages every now and then. He's still able to find positive energy, so he still can sing and laugh with the few friends left with him.

What news of Ossama?

There is no confirmed news of Ossama yet, other than rumours that make us believe he is probably still alive but detained in one of the regime's underground security centres in Damascus. He is one of many peaceful media activists that the regime has dealt with violently; one of many non-combatants punished for trying to expose oppression by the Assad regime.

Will Basset be able to play football/soccer again?

No - unfortunately three injuries in different parts of his legs will make it impossible for him to play football again.

What is the humanitarian situation in besieged Homs?

Until the 7th of February, 2014, the number of civilians besieged in Homs was estimated to be around 3000, including families with children and even infants born under siege. In February 2014 a deal was brokered by the UN mission to Syria between the regime and the be-sieged, allowing the evacuation of some of the civilians (excl. men between 16 and 55). The evacuation took place and around 1400 civilians were able to leave the siege. The rest decided to stay, because they didn't believe they could simply surrender now and give their homes to the regime after all they have been through. About 400 young men took that opportunity and left the siege with the families, however, they were detained, under the supervision of UN, in a school in Homs city centre, some were released and about 60 are still detained. The siege is still very strict, no supplies can be smuggled in, only some parcels of food and medicine were delivered into the siege in Feb 2014, and the be-sieged have to economise with that. Furthermore, the shelling from regime's army and pro-Assad militias still continues every day.

Are there other sieges similar to Homs in the country?

Although Homs' siege was the first and the longest, other towns are experiencing similar conditions. Yarmouk Palestinian refugees camp near Damascus is under-siege and its inhabitants are dying of hunger, while the international community's efforts are still limited to small deals that do well in the media but do not solve the problem. Al Moaddamiya, near Damascus too, is also a town under siege, where images of children in famine are as harsh and disturbing as those of known tragic famines that shocked the world before. The Syrian opposition fighters are also putting two villages that support Assad (for sectarian reasons) under partial siege, near Aleppo, although the conditions of that siege are relatively less harsh. That doesn't justify a siege of civilians but highlights the fact that the regime has much more facility to support its audience than the opposition, including food and medicine supplies delivered by airplanes.

What are they fighting for? We don't see families? And women? They had no role?

The role of women in the Syrian Revolution has been central since the first minute, with iconic female activists, dissidents, mothers, daughters, artists and even fighters. However, the film's protagonists are young men who come from a conventional background. When the arming of the revolution started they all decided to be on the frontline; it is no surprise in this context that women are not part of their daily life. There were women in the rushes of the film, the be-sieged families live only 500 meters behind the frontline you see in the film, but none of them was a main character, and none of them were in the places where Basset stayed. During editing, the director, Talal Derki, decided to stick to the world of the fighting young men, a strict editorial choice that allowed the coherence of the film as it is today. In Return To Homs, you can see Basset's mother, a relative of his, and his brother's daughter, Sham, in the part when he leaves Homs to the north. Other films will tell the stories of the women and the families, this film stays with its characters closely, it is a frontline film, and it doesn't claim telling the whole story.

Who is "Khalid" to whom they refer various times in the film?

Khalid Ibn Al Walid was the leader of Prophet Mohammad's army, he almost never lost a battle, and for that the history of Islam relates stories of how Mohammad prayed long to his God that Khalid joins him. Khalid died in Homs, and was buried there. He became like the city's patron saint. Homsis proudly call themselves his Grandsons. His most famous quote, was the one he said when dying in Homs: "I've fought in so many battles that there is no spot in my body left without a scar or a wound made by a spear or sword. And yet here I am, dying on my bed like an old camel. May the eyes of the cowards never rest"

What is the kind of political system guys like Basset would dream of?

Around Basset, you can find all kinds of different men, with a wide spectrum of ideologies, Moderate Islamists, leftists, Liberals, Radical Salafists, but more widely you would find people like Basset himself, who have no ideological agenda, who are only inspired by the notion of freedom, and who cannot take the injustice anymore. Basset, like so many others around Syria, is an

independent militia leader, who insisted on not receiving any conditional funds, what made him become an icon, but didn't allow his militia to grow or his arming to be prominent. He stands for all of those Syrian usually forgotten by the Western media, those who don't want more than safeguarding their own neighbourhoods, and seek a better life for their children, who might be conservative, or became so after so much death and violence, but do not have a theocratic agenda, and are actually disgusted by those fighting for any agenda while people need a much simpler agenda: survival.

Did you hide the extremist jihadists in your editing of the film?

Certainly not, and even the men with beards and shaved moustaches you see in the film are mostly not really Salafists... they are only a few of many who were driven by pain and anger into an extreme position, in the sectarian sense, but not in an ideological sense. During the making of the film, and around Basset and his group, there were actually only a few Salafists. Salafists were more present in other places in the country, but not everywhere, and they were never alone any how!

What was life in Homs like before all of this?

Homs was Syrian 3rd city, with circa 1.2M inhabitants, and buzzing commercial scene. It was ruled by a governor who was a personal friend of Bashar Assad and his dead brother, Bassel, who was doing his best to make a neo-liberal centre of the city, initiating many big real estate projects, all funded by Qatari investors, and most of which made the Homs people so angry, it wasn't for their benefit. Homs people are famous throughout the Levant for their sense of humour, this can be read in historical references dating back to the 9th century. A common myth in the region makes Homs the source of all jokes in the world.
