

Toronto Palestine Film Festival

September 26-October 2, 2009
102A-1075 Bay St., Ste 148
Toronto, ON M5S 2B2



BACKGROUND

SLINGSHOT'S GAZA RAPPERS SAFE BUT NOT SOUND

Toronto –Jackie Reem Salloum's acclaimed documentary [Slingshot Hip Hop](#), which closed the first annual Toronto Palestine Film Festival, riveted the sold-out crowd with the rhythms and [personal stories](#) of Palestinian hip hop artists from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza who rapped about their daily struggles as a form of resistance to ghettoization and occupation.



The film featured trailblazing performances by the “Palestinian Rapperz” better known as “PR” -- the first rappers from Gaza. PR is comprised of four friends from Gaza: Mohammed Al-Farra (“DR”), Mahmoud Fayyad (“Kan’an”), Moataz Al-Hewaihy (“Mezo”) and Ayman Meghames. PR described life in Gaza as being trapped in “a big prison” and their voices were the only way they could get out. Hip Hop was their lifeline as Mahmoud explained, “thankfully, rap gives us oxygen”.

PR: Mohammad, Ayman, Mahmoud, Moataz

Inspired by the music of PR, [Ibrahim](#) from the Nimsawi Camp in Khan Younis also found solace in rap. Growing up in harsh conditions, Ibrahim explained the refugee camp was only known for attacks and destruction inflicted by the Israeli army. He described seeing all the colours of the rainbow at night from the bombs falling on the camp. He started rapping “... to release what's inside of me but no matter how hard I try I'm still not able to express my feelings, especially the devastation.”

Ibrahim at Nimsawi Refugee Camp



The recent 23 day Israeli offensive against the people of Gaza has turned the impoverished occupied territory into a [humanitarian catastrophe](#). The rappers from Gaza and their families faced some of the fiercest fighting ever seen in the region and [destruction on an unimaginable scale](#) as a result of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. Salloum was able to contact several members of PR and Ibrahim, and provided TPFF with an update on their situations.

Ayman and his family live in the eastern part of Gaza City, an area that was hammered by Israeli warplanes and tanks. During the course of the invasion, Ayman told Salloum that he could see the Israeli tanks surround his neighbourhood. Apartment buildings were collapsing or

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on fire with people still inside them. Ayman celebrated his birthday sheltering in the “safe” room of his home with his parents and sister and brother. His father left the room to pray when four rockets hit the home killing Ayman’s father. Ayman and his family are among the 50,000 Gazans who are now homeless, and the countless others grieving the loss of their loved ones.

Mohammad’s grandparents live in Gaza City where they sheltered with extended family members from the intense shelling in the city. While gathered together in the home, it was hit by two Israeli rockets. Mohammad’s family survived the attack, however, the house was partially destroyed. Mohammad’s parents were in Khan Younis at the time and are also safe.

Moataz lives in a suburb of Gaza City with his parents and siblings. Moataz and his family are among the 400,000 Gazans living without running water and the 600,000 living without electricity. Moataz told Salloum there was no way to describe what he has seen in Gaza City. He was completely overwhelmed by the death and destruction he witnessed.

Ibrahim and his family remained in Nimsawi Camp in Khan Younis during the attacks. Despite living through years of Israeli army invasions on the camp, Ibrahim told Salloum the situation there was horrific. The already difficult conditions in the camp have been exacerbated by further destruction and the lack of water or electricity. Ibrahim, who struggled to deal with previous attacks on the camp, told Salloum he has never seen devastation like this before. During the bombardment, he pleaded with Salloum to tell her government to make Israel stop the shelling.

Salloum said that the rappers are horrified and angered by the assault on Gaza. They asked her whether people in America knew what was happening to them, and to send them pictures of protests. They told her what she saw on the news was nothing compared to what they were experiencing. They kept reiterating that what was happening in Gaza was indescribable.

In the documentary, Mohammad’s father, a former singer jailed by Israel for singing about Palestinian suffering, said “art is the most important messenger”. It is with the spirit of this message that TPF is working on our second annual film festival to continue showcasing incredible Palestinian narratives and talents.

The rappers of Gaza may be reached at their myspace pages:

PR: <http://www.myspace.com/palrapperz>; Ibrahim: <http://www.myspace.com/ibrahimrhall>.

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