



WOMEN'S VOICES NOW

FOUNDING AND MISSION

In January 2010, an idea was conceived: To create an on-line platform from which filmmakers, journalists, citizen journalists and artists could speak directly to an international audience about the global struggle for women's rights. In May 2010, Women's Voices Now, a New York-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was born.

Women's Voices Now (WVN) was founded by Leslie Sacks, a Los Angeles-based philanthropist and gallerist, and is driven by Catinca Tabacaru, an entrepreneur and attorney by profession. In addition, WVN is led by a team of passionate professionals experienced in the fields of film, human rights, law, corporate management and the Near East.

Our mission is to empower women and give voice to the struggle for civil, economic and political rights. Women's Voices Now creates platforms from which women of all faiths and backgrounds can tackle the issues of social justice with an

international audience, women can communicate with each other, and the dialogue on women's rights can be elevated by a multitude of views from diverse national, economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds.



First Project: *Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival*

Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival is WVN's response to the critical global focus on women's rights in Muslim-majority countries. There is a need to elevate the dialogue, to add complexity and nuance to a discussion that reveals countless conflicts between religion and politics, tradition and modernity, and written versus practiced civil norms.

Overview: This collection of 98 short films from 40 countries gives voice to women of all faiths living in Muslim-majority countries and Muslim women living as minorities around the globe. This unique project highlights pro-women voices from within the Muslim World and presents an unfiltered and honest account of these women's stories. The scope of the films' subject must be pertinent to the spirit of the Festival to the experiences that shape these women's lives, the challenges that must be overcome before gender equality becomes the status quo, and the people who are making this transformation happen.

Why the Muslim World?

Today, women in Muslim-majority countries still face many legal and cultural impediments to their basic freedoms and civil rights. However, these women are showing an incredible capacity for transforming their communities from patriarchal



societies, with large discrepancies between the rights and welfare of men and women, into more open and tolerant societies, accepting of diverse religious, political and social standpoints. No group is better equipped to present the issues facing women of the Muslim world to an international audience than the women who live and breathe them each day. These women are at the forefront of challenging abusive and limiting political, religious, economic, social and educational environments and giving them a voice is key to their success. Broad and lasting social change can only be achieved by an educated and united community. On the subject of women of the Muslim world, our global community is anything but educated and united. The same obstacle exists at the local level where women of the Muslim world originate from 48 drastically different Muslim-majority countries, countless religious beliefs, and mutually exclusive social and political environments. **Women will be able to use the Festival to make their voices heard directly by an international audience, which will increase awareness, empowerment, and connectivity within their communities.**

Submissions: Filmmakers at any level of experience, of any gender, nationality, and religion, were invited to submit films, but emphasis was placed on generating submissions from women living in Muslim-majority countries. The ending results were over 200 submissions by filmmakers from 40 countries, including Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, India, and Turkey.

On-line Presence: The purpose of the WVN Festival is to reach as broad an audience as possible in order to break boundaries and open and elevate the dialogue on gender equality. The medium of film, specifically short-film available on the Internet allows for the broadest possible reach into the most remote areas of the world, filling the void in information left by traditional media. We're connecting people around the world to women with whom they ordinarily would not have contact. WVN is creating a community which demands gender equality. *Currently our online collection is being viewed in over 160 countries.*

Categories:

- **Documentary Shorts:** Films presenting factual materials with little or no fictional additions. (30 min. max)
- **Fiction Shorts:** (30 min. max)
- **Experimental Shorts:** Silent films, mobile films, animated films, photo montages, music videos or any other type of non-traditional film, as long as the work fits within the spirit and scope of the Festival. (90-300 sec in length)
- **Student Shorts:** Only students enrolled in school at the time of the submission may submit to this category. (10.5 min. max)



Prizes:

There is a total of \$35,000 in prize money, which is open to everyone regardless of film experience, nationality, or faith. Prize money goes to the top 3 films in each category, top 3 Audience Choice films, plus 8 Honorable Mentions.

Benefits:

- New filmmakers get exposure due to screenings all over the world.
- Learn about the challenges facing women in the Muslim World and the struggle for gender equality.
- Help mend the gap between the Western and Islamic world.
- Diminish misconceptions about women and Islam.

Statistics:

A few reasons to join the struggle for gender equality:

- 70% of women across the globe experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.
- Women perform 66% of the world's work, produce 50% of the food, earn just 10% of the income and own only 1% of the property.
- An estimated 120 to 140 million women have been subject to the harmful and dangerous practice of female genital cutting and 3 million girls continue to be at risk each year. The practice persists because it is sustained by social perceptions, including that girls and their families will face shame, social exclusion and diminished marriage prospects if they forego cutting.
- According to a 2002 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, "honour killings" take place in Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco and other Mediterranean and Gulf countries. It also occurs in countries such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom within immigrant communities. It is not only in Islamic countries or communities that this act of violence is prevalent. Brazil is cited as a case in point, where killing is justified to defend the honour of the husband in the case of a wife's adultery.
- Of 130 countries rated in 2008 by the World Economic Forum according to the status of women, 8 of the bottom 10 were majority Muslim. Yemen was in last place, with Chad, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan right behind it. No Muslim country ranks in the top 40. Kazakhstan ranks highest, at number 45, followed by Uzbekistan, at 55.



- Trafficking women and girls is often connected to organized crime and has developed into a highly profitable business that generates an estimated US\$7-12 billion per year.
- Young women generally know significantly less about HIV/AIDS than their male counterparts. Just 1 in 5 married women in Bangladesh had heard of AIDS; in Sudan only 5 percent of women knew condom use could prevent HIV infection. Both realities — lack of knowledge and lack of power — obliterate women's ability to protect themselves from infection.
- The victims in today's armed conflicts are far more likely to be civilians than soldiers. Some 70 percent of the casualties in recent conflicts have been non-combatants — most of them women and children. Women's bodies have become part of the battleground for those who use terror as a tactic of war — they are raped, abducted, humiliated and made to undergo forced pregnancy, sexual abuse and slavery.
- For women aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability. In a 1994 study based on World Bank data about ten selected risk factors facing women in this age group, rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria.
- But all across the globe, men and women alike are pressing for change and rallying for gender equality. Now is the time to give voice to those unheard.

[Sources: UNFPA, UN Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, World Bank, Amnesty International, World Economic Forum, ILO]



Festival Open to all Filmmakers:

Filmmakers of all faiths and genders were invited to submit their films online. Once accepted into the competition, the films were first reviewed and rated by web users and then officially voted on by a panel of judges. Making the films available online has resulted in people in 160 countries watching, commenting on, and rating the films.

As Festival organizers program the film lineup, Tabacaru says they aim to present an unfiltered account of women's stories as well as highlight women's voices from across the Muslim world. "So what we're exploring are women, women's rights, women's achievements, the abuses and expansions of women's rights. We're non-religious, we're non-political, but what we've created is a collection of films about women who in some way are touched by Islam. And that is new," she says.

It was especially important to her and the other Festival organizers that some of the films focus on the positive contributions and accomplishments of Muslim women - and they do. "We're very used to hearing about the Muslim woman as the victim, the oppressed, the veiled," she says. "What we're seeing through this Festival is that we're getting stories which we would have never dreamt of getting. They are about women doing things that, before doing this project, I would never have imagined."

Films about India:

New York City resident Vandana Sood is a 30-year-old Indian-born artist who entered a film in the competition. Her 21-minute documentary, "[The Taxi Takes: Women and Islam](#)," is about a Muslim woman taxi driver in Mumbai, India, who candidly discusses the controversial issue of the burka, or veil, with her fellow passengers.

Sood says the Festival has provided filmmakers like her with a unique opportunity to present a different perspective about Muslim women. "I think that is incredibly empowering because mainstream media does tend to typecast and stereotype Muslims - and Muslim women in particular - under a certain garb and ideally this Film Festival will break some of those stereotypes."

Films about Iran:

Alyse Stepanian is an Iranian-born Armenian who has been living in the U.S. for the past 30 years. Her film, "[Roghieh](#)," is based on dream journals she wrote about her experiences after the Iranian revolution of 1979.



While Stepanian herself is not a Muslim, she says growing up in a Muslim country helped her gain a lot of respect for the women there. "When you look at a country like Iran, or the women in Iran, from someplace like America, people see it as very exotic, or they see it as dangerous or scary, but when you live in a place like that, you're just living there, it's your home and you're not afraid," she says.



Festival organizer Tabacaru says the response so far to the online film competition has been very positive. The Festival received over 200 entries from 40 countries. Over 30 of the entries came from Afghanistan alone (many had to be smuggled out). And this is one thing this Festival does; it provides information and it provides a new and more complex and nuanced view of these women, which I hope will challenge perceptions and will challenge the way we are so typically used to relating to the Muslim world. Because I think it's very important to the future," she says.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/arts/Online-Film-Competition-Focuses-on-Muslim-Women--106699379.html>



OUR STAFF



Catinca Tabacaru – Executive Director and General Counsel

Catinca is a human rights attorney and an art/film curator based out of New York City. She obtained her J.D. and LL.M. (Masters in International and Comparative Law) from Duke University School of Law in 2007. While earning her degree she interned for the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, and worked as a legal assistant for the Office of Chief Defense Counsel for the Military Commissions in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After spending two years as a commercial litigator for Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP, Catinca's search for meaning in her career led her back to the not-for-profit international public service world. The issues of gender equality, ethnic and religious intolerance, and the upholding of human rights in our modern world are the driving factors behind Catinca's work. An idealist with a pragmatic mind, Catinca focuses on playing her part in transforming our global society into a world where women and girls can be privy to the same freedoms and opportunities available to their male counterparts.



Cassandra Schaffa - Director of Festival Operations

Cassandra is a recent graduate of New York University's Cinema Studies Masters program. While attending NYU, Cassandra was awestruck by films highlighting the challenges faced by women around the globe and inspired by the strength of these women to build a better future. She firmly believes that women are the key to social change and she hopes to use film as an essential tool to further the progress that has already been made. Cassandra also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Broadcast Communication and Spanish from Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL and is an avid Ultimate Frisbee player. She currently resides in New York City.



Miriam Wakim - Director of Fundraising

Miriam graduated from Indiana University in 2006 with Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. Since then she has worked with the United Nations World Food Program in Syria assisting Iraqi refugees and has traveled extensively in the Middle East. Her experiences and conversations with the people in the region helped her understand the social hardship many women experience when voicing gender issues and the need for social equality - a hardship perpetuated by the formation and maintenance of a masculine discourse often upheld



by women themselves. This inspired her to focus her work on social issues affecting women across the globe. She will soon continue her studies in New York University's Near Eastern Studies Masters Program. Miriam currently lives in New York City and speaks Arabic and French.



Betsy Laikin - Project Manager

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Latin American studies and Spanish, Betsy moved to Montevideo, Uruguay, where she worked as an English teacher and grant writer/translator for several non-profit organizations. Receiving a fellowship, she moved to Israel and worked as a mentor for Spanish speaking immigrants, while teaching in Arab schools with the Jaffa Institute. Betsy developed a strong passion for film while working with the Tel Aviv Cinemateque. She then moved to New York City, and after interning for the Havana Film Festival, she joined the incredible team of Women's Voices Now. She is elated to be part of an organization that connects and empowers women throughout the world by utilizing film and art.



Mona Pajwani - Project Manager

Mona is a corporate lawyer and has extensive experience and understanding of the Finance industry and Capital markets. Prior to joining Women's Voices Now, she worked at Edelweiss Capital Limited, a Mumbai based Investment Bank. She had a short stint at ICICI Prudential Life insurance Co before she moved to Investment Banking. She has also dabbled with Criminal Law, where she started her career and has had the opportunity to work on cases such as the Mumbai bomb blasts, and Mumbai Public Services Commission scam. Mona has earned the L.L.B degree and the Masters in Banking & Finance from Mumbai University. She says the non-profit sector is a natural inclination which she discovered while she was associated with EdelGive Foundation. She lives in New York city with husband Nick Pajwani.



Press Releases



- Non-profit
- Film Festival

Media Contact: Marie Bargas
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

WOMEN'S VOICES NOW PRESENTS:
Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival
Opening Night – Hosted by author Christina Asquith, Honors “Women Warriors” - Lara Logan, Neda Agha-Soltan and Roxana Saberi – Charity Auction featuring the work of Shepard Fairey
Los Angeles Film School
March 17-19, 2011 in Hollywood, California

February 21, 2011, Hollywood, CA. In a decisive move to honor women whose courage and heroism have brought attention to the plight of women in Muslim-majority countries, New York based non-profit **Women's Voices Now** will honor journalist **Lara Logan** and the Egyptian women who saved her, Iranian political martyr **Neda Agha-Soltan** and author and former political prisoner in Iran - **Roxana Saberi** at the opening night celebration of **Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival**. “We were so moved by the rescue of journalist Lara Logan by the Egyptian women and soldiers that we had to honor her and those brave women who rescued her,” stated **WVN Executive Director Catinca Tabacaru** in a recent interview, “These good Samaritans responded to a woman in danger without thinking about her ethnicity or religious affiliation. This kind of strength and humanity is what we are drawing the world's attention to through our collection of films. Through the media, we aspire to connect women of all societies under the common rights of freedom from abuse and injustice.”

Christina Asquith (Host/Guest Speaker) - An award-winning journalist for over 14 years, Christina has written for **The New York Times, The Economist, The Christian Science Monitor, The Guardian** and was a staff writer at **The Philadelphia Inquirer**. Her book, “**Sisters in War: Love, Survival and Family in the New Iraq**” is based off of the 18 months she lived in and reported from Baghdad, Iraq.

Lara Logan (Honoree) – In the aftermath of the resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011 the American journalist lost her crew in the frenzy and was immediately swarmed by a hostile crowd that jostled her. She suffered what CBS initially called a “brutal and sustained sexual assault and beating,” from which she was eventually rescued by a group of Egyptian women and soldiers. According to *The*



Sunday Times of London attackers used fists and flag poles against the **CBS News Chief Correspondent**, while wounds that remained hours later were the result of "aggressive pinching." Logan is reportedly anxious to return to her post at **60 Minutes**.

Neda Agha-Soltan (Honoree) – Iranian icon, Neda Agha-Soltan was a 26-year-old Iranian woman who was shot to death on a Tehran street in the unrest that followed the country's disputed election in June 2009. Soltan was described as an apolitical girl-next-door who loved traveling to Turkey where her hair did not have to be covered in public. Soltan became an instant symbol of the anti-government movement when a shocking video of her death was shared on social networking sites. The resulting **HBO documentary** narrated by **Shoreh Aghdashloo** touched audiences around the world and Soltan became an international symbol of freedom and peace.

Roxana Saberi (Honoree/Guest Speaker) - Roxana Saberi moved to Iran in 2003 to work as the Iran correspondent for the U.S.-based Feature Story News. She filed reports for organizations such as NPR, BBC, ABC Radio and Fox News and was working on a book about Iranian society when she was arrested on January 31, 2009. Saberi was later charged and sentenced to eight years in prison on a trumped-up charge of espionage. In May 2009, under international pressure, an Iranian court overturned the sentence, and she was released. Since her release, Saberi has joined others in bringing attention to the situation of human rights in Iran. Saberi has published in **The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and Chicago Tribune**; and been interviewed on news programs of organizations such as **FOX News, ABC, NBC, CBS, BBC, CNN, PRI, NPR**, and **C-SPAN**, as well as shows such as **The Daily Show with Jon Stewart**.

About the Film Festival: The Film Festival, pieces of which have been screened at the **New York University, American University, University of Michigan, Dearborn** and **Simmons College** is quickly garnering attention because of the timely relevance of its critical content to world affairs. *"By providing on-line access to a collection of relevant stories told by women of all faiths and backgrounds living in Muslim-majority countries, we are filling a void in today's available information,"* says WVN Director of Fundraising Miriam Wakim. *"These are the exact voices that are left out of traditional news sources,"* continues Wakim, *"no complete representation is possible without the participation of the exact people living that life."* In addition to themed film programs, the Festival includes exciting round-table discussions, book signings hosted by prominent authors, performance art pieces speaking to the issues addressed by the Festival and monitors playing the Festival's experimental films.

- **Shepard Fairey:** This Los Angeles-based street artist first gained attention for the renowned **Obey Giant** stencil to screen prints of political revolutionaries and rock stars. Fairey is the creative genius behind the red, white, and blue Obama campaign image that swept the globe during the Obama campaign. He has donated two limited edition, numbered prints. (photos available)
- **Charity Auction:** Pieces will be auctioned from **Shepard Fairey, Rachel Monosov, Carly Ivan Garcia** and **Yapci Ramos**.
- **Master Perfumer:** Celebrated Master Perfumer and Quantum Alchemist **Libby Patterson** from **LPO** will be showcasing scent journeys featuring flights of perfumes from the "Cradle of Civilization Collection" - Night Blooming Jasmines and Roses from the Desert.

The Festival also includes video booths streaming live messages from the American audience, as well as a Closing Night Gala.



For the complete schedule of films and events please log on to: <http://womensvoicesnow.org/events>

Our Sponsors:

- Leslie Sacks Fine Art (www.lesliesacks.com)
- The Los Angeles Film School (www.lafilm.edu)
- Levantine Cultural Center (www.levantinecenter.org)
- The Children's Rights Institute (www.childrensrighsinstitute.org)

Our Supporters:

- Women in Film and Television Toronto (www.wift.com)
- Women in Film (www.wif.org)
- One Long House (www.onelonghouse.com)
- Libby Patterson Organics (<http://web.mac.com/libbypatterson>)

About Women's Voices Now: Our mission is to empower women and give voice to the struggle for civil, economic and political rights. In our first year, WVN is hosting *Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival* giving voice to women of all faiths living in Muslim-majority countries and Muslim women living as minorities around the world.

We are a young organization founded in January 2010. We have made great strides since that time and have earned the support of countless established and respected partners. Watch us grow and please support our efforts. We aim to educate an international audience and empower women to bring gender equality to local communities around the world.

For more information please log on to our website: <http://womensvoicesnow.org/>

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Non-profit
Film Festival

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FOR IMMEDIATE USE:

Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival & Fair
To Take Place at the Los Angeles Film School
March 17-19, 2011 in Hollywood, California

"... there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women." - Kofi Annan

January 25, 2011, Hollywood, CA. One year ago, supported by a qualified board and passionate staff, interns and volunteers, Catinca Tabacaru started building the first international film Festival focused on women of the Muslim World. The project is based on the original vision of Leslie Sacks, a Los Angeles-based art gallerist and philanthropist, and the Founder of Women's Voices Now. Today Women's Voices Now (WVN) has created an on-line platform from which filmmakers and citizen journalists can speak directly to one another and to an international audience about women's rights in the Muslim world.

"The international response to our request for films has been astounding," says WVN Executive Director Catinca Tabacaru. *Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival* (the "Festival") has received over 200 films from 40 countries. The Festival selected 98 shorts for competition that range from fiction to documentary to experimental - all of which may be viewed at www.womensvoicesnow.org/watch. Men, women and children in 160 countries are currently watching these films. The films contribute to filling the void in information left by traditional media.

The winning films will be selected by an esteemed panel of judges, including Cyrus Nowrasteh (writer and director, *The Stoning of Soraya M.*), Roxana Saberi (author, *Between Two Worlds: My Life and Captivity in Iran*) and Samantha Cohen (documentarian, *WAR DON DON*). A complete list of judges can be found at www.WomensVoicesNow.org/judges.

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signings hosted by prominent authors, performance art pieces speaking to the issues addressed by the Festival and monitors playing the Festival's experimental films.

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**WOMEN'S
VOICES**

F R O M T H E

**muslim
WORLD**

A SHORT-FILM FESTIVAL

**Groundbreaking Short-Film Festival Launches Films On-line
Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film
Festival invites audiences to watch and rate films by citizen
journalists and filmmakers**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

New York, NY October 25, 2010. Nine months ago, an idea was conceived: To create an on-line platform from which citizen journalists and filmmakers could speak directly to an international audience about women's rights in the Muslim world. The ensuing collection of films would contribute to filling the void in information left by traditional media, news and art sources. "We came together and conceived this idea and nine months later, well, here it is," laughs WVN Co-Founder Catinca Tabacaru.

In June 2010, WVN began accepting short-film submissions to Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival focused on women of all faiths living in Muslim-majority countries and Muslim women living as minorities around the globe. The Festival is the only one of its kind and it's causing a stir in both the media and the political spheres. Not only is the Festival giving voice to women who are traditionally censored by their governments and traditional media, but it's debunking the myth of the woman in the Muslim world as the victim and replacing her with a more nuanced and honest image – the heroin of her society.

Due to the Festival's acceptance of all filmmakers, regardless of experience, age, gender, nationality or faith, it is obtaining information and art from a new pool of individuals. Since opening submissions, the Festival has received over 90 films from 33 countries around the world, with Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and the USA leading in number of submissions. "We are so pleased with the range of films that have been submitted," says WVN Director of Festival Operations Cassandra Schaffa, "Not only do we have a representation of women's voices from four continents, but the scope of topics explored in the films are wonderfully varied. We've got everything from women breaking barriers on the work front, to violence against women, to performance art, to the power of friendship, to the debate on the burka, to immigration. We're truly capturing stories that unfortunately never make it into mainstream media."

On October 4, 2010, the films became available on-line at www.WomensVoicesNow.org/watch. "The on-line component of the Festival allows for anyone, anywhere, at any time to watch and learn from these stories," says WVN Director of Fundraising Miriam Wakim. With audience participation being highly



encouraged on the WVN site, the citizen becomes the judge of worthy information and art. Thus far, the site is being accessed in just over 100 countries around the world. The films are open for ratings and comments and Audience Choice prizes will be awarded to the top three rated films at a Festival event being held at the Los Angeles Film School March 10-12, 2011. In addition, prizes totaling US\$35,000 will be awarded to the top films in Documentary, Fiction, Student and Experimental categories.

Submissions will remain open until November 24 while the on-line ratings competition will continue through the end of the year.





Revolutionary Short-Film Festival elevates the dialogue on women of the Muslim world—a real advancement in international freedom of expression standards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

New York, NY August 9, 2010. Over the past few decades, we've learned that the empowerment of women is the only proven catalyst towards the erosion of intolerance, ignorance and greed—the same human deficiencies that lead to violence, war and poverty. Women's Voices Now (WVN), a new not-for-profit social enterprise based in New York City has created an on-line platform (www.womensvoicesnow.org) where an international audience can now access information originating directly from the most underrepresented and silenced women in the world—the exact information that is systematically excluded from traditional media sources like TV and newspapers.

“To truly elevate the dialogue on the critical importance of gender equality, people need access to direct information from women around the world,” explains WVN Co-Founder Catinca Tabacaru who started the project in early 2010. “Our mission is to empower women and give voice to the struggle for civil, economic and political rights,” says Tabacaru. Although still a very young organization, WVN has earned the interest and support of some of today's most influential organizations—including, Women In Film, Amnesty International, the World Bank, Freedom House, American Society for Muslim Advancement and the State Department's Secretary's Office for Global Women's Issues.

“Our first project, Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival is unique. By making a collection of relevant stories told by women of all faiths and backgrounds living in Muslim-majority countries available on-line, we are filling a void in today's available information,” says WVN Director of Fundraising Miriam Wakim. “These are the exact voices that are left out of traditional news sources,” continues Wakim, “no truth can be complete without the participation of the exact people living that truth.”

Filmmakers of any gender, nationality and religion, both amateur and professional, are invited to submit short films via WVN's online platform at www.womensvoicesnow.org. The films are available for viewing on the WVN website and thus accessible to anyone,



anywhere in the world. “The art of film is a powerful tool for modern day social change movements,” explains Director of Festival Operations Cassandra Schaffa. “We hope to inform policy-makers and inspire them to make decisions that take the status of women into consideration,” says Schaffa. In the words of Kofi Annan, “it is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race.”



PRESS PLACEMENTS

Women's Voices Now has garnered significant press and media attention for their unique concept of giving voice to women who are traditionally censored or ignored, and their events have been covered in such publications as:

- The Huffington Post • Time Out New York
- Voice of America • NY Daily News
- The Independent • Elan Magazine



Women's Voices Now: Women's Film Festival on Emancipation
Mai Ayyad

Cairo, Egypt, February 8, 2011-Feminism is an often debated issue, yet it is not yet exhausted. One of the latest additions to this field is US-based non-profit organization Women's Voices Now. As its first project, the organization hosts *Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival*, that 'marries artists with activism, and focuses on the extension of women's rights.' It took six months of extensive research to crystallize the idea that was originally proposed by Leslie Sacks, the organization's Founder, foremost supporter and seed funder.

'By empowering women in the Muslim countries, you will be getting to the crux of where the women's movement is happening now,' says Catinca Tabacaru, the Executive Director. 'Within Muslim majority countries, there are challenges against the limitations and abuses of women's rights. There is also pro-women work being done, and resourceful educated women working for one another.'

Being a non-profit organization in the US entails having a plan. The plan of Women's Voices Now is an educational one – filling the void in the available information about the Muslim world, and looking for alternative ways to look into the lives of women.



'Mainstream media sources tell one side of the story,' Miriam Wakim, the director of Operations points out. 'We do not want to rely on CNN, or *the New York Times* for our information; we want to have an unfiltered voice that comes straight from the women in plight.'

Given the educational and didactic agenda of the organization, clichéd and stereotypical representations of women are absent from the festival. The woman is the subject; she is the heroine bearing a long history of victimization.

Over 200 films were submitted; 98 were accepted, of which six are Egyptian: *Her Man* and *Spring '89* by Ayten Amin, *Nour* by Mona Makram, *The Nonsense* by Noha Reshwan, *Male and Female* by Ahmed Adel, and *Girls' Talk* by Mayye Zayed.

'The Egyptian filmmakers that we have in the competition are able to address their issues from an artistic, peaceful place,' says Tabacaru. 'The films are lighter in comparison to others; yet they still convey the message without being overtly heavy.'

Depending on the word of fifteen judges, including film directors, art professors, critics, artists and journalists, the top three films will be chosen from each category (Fiction, Documentary, Student and Experimental), followed by eight honourable mentions, and three prizes for the audience choice awards via online voting.

The organization depends on fundraising and donations for its funding, and is hoping to bring winning filmmakers to Hollywood for the festival's ceremony on March 17, 2011. Women Voices Now is animated by the desire to demand for women's rights. Equally important, it clarifies their position in the world, presenting talented women directors as well as stories of resilience and independence.

The film festival comes in the form of an online platform. Herein lies its brilliance; all the films are available as long as there is internet access. Check out [the site](#) here. Watch our impressive Egyptian films and vote for their talented artists. Then, have a cinematic cruise across the Muslim world and enjoy some fantastic filmmaking.

Reviews for all the Egyptian films in the competition will be published here on Cairo 360.

<http://www.cairo360.com/article/film/1484/womens-voices-now-womens-film-festival-on-empowerment>





Film Festival Brings Muslim Women's Voices to Dearborn

UM-Dearborn will host Women's Voices from the Muslim World Jan. 27, which will feature short films on life for women of Islam.

By Jessica Carreras

January 24, 2011-To learn the real stories of Muslim women, they must come from the women themselves.





Online Film Contest Focuses on Muslim Women

Filmmakers invited to submit films for the first ever Muslim Women's Film Festival

November 04, 2010, Washington DC

An online competition is now open for what's being called the first-ever international showcase of short films about Islam and women. The films focus on women of all faiths and backgrounds who are living in Muslim-majority countries, as well as Muslim women living as minorities around the world. The festival's lineup hasn't been finalized yet. Digital film entries are still being accepted in an online competition that runs through November 24 of this year and is open to filmmakers of all genders and backgrounds.

Women's Voices Now

When human rights lawyer Catinca Tabacaru heard that someone was thinking about putting together a film festival about Muslim women, she knew she had to get involved. So, in January 2010, Tabacaru joined with philanthropist Leslie Sacks and others to found Women's Voices Now, the non-profit organization behind "Women's Voices from the Muslim World - a Short-Film Festival."

The goal of the festival says Tabacaru, is to present an unbiased and comprehensive look at how women of all faiths, including Muslims, are asserting their rights both within and outside the Islamic world.

"There's so much work being done in Muslim majority countries and by Muslim women outside of those countries for women's rights," says Tabacaru. "There is a social movement happening and that's what we wanted to get behind."



The Women's Voices Now Film Festival: Women's Voices from the Muslim World

By Qanta Ahmed

October 8, 2010-Few viewers today know that there are 48 Muslim majority nations, or that "Islam" encompasses both a religion with dozens of distinct sects, and a global community of 1.67 billion with hundreds of distinctive cultures, languages and social mores. In the post 9/11 era this rich, variegated tapestry has been expertly and quite deliberately distilled into a monolithic manifestation of threatening fundamentalism. This simplification -- one overtly hostile to many Western values -- is a heavily mediated portrayal, innately appealing to mass media consumption. Such black-and-white bipolarity is enormously palatable when packaged in punchy, 90-second sound bytes.

Women's Voices Now, a new New York City-based not-for-profit organization focused on media and women's rights -- recognizes this deficit and in direct response is providing one of the most exciting platforms yet that seeks to change this perception by providing access to diverse and honest information. In many ways, we ourselves as Westerners are just as veiled as the Muslim women and girls who simultaneously fascinate and frighten so many. Our veil comes in the form not of polyester but a polyglot of ignorance. We are confined by this ignorance, a confinement which is derived very much from a lack of access to a direct experience of Muslim families and cultures. We lack this access both because of geographic limitations and because of the stark, simplified language, devoid of nuance and complexity, with which the media interprets Islam on satellite television. One woman now seeks to change that, and is well on her way to accomplishing this.

Catinca Tabacaru is a corporate lawyer, who, fortunate for Muslim women and girls, was looking for inspiration beyond billable hours in a high-powered Manhattan law firm. She chose to focus on humanitarian issues and for a time was part of the legal counsel to the United Nations at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Tanzania and later for the Guantanamo Defense Team in Washington, D.C. Still, she realized she sought greater impact on human rights and her desire to contribute and serve resulted in the birth of [Women's Voices Now \(WVN\)](#).



Early in the charity's history, Catinca and colleagues hit upon the concept of a film festival focusing on women and girls living in Muslim majority societies and Muslim women specifically living as minorities around the globe. Their goal was simple: to stimulate and foster citizen journalism and in doing so leverage the diversification of such voices to translate the nuances of the Muslim world. The voices of film makers, whether amateur or professional, will allow viewers to experience the diversity and complexity of the Islamic world through the eyes of the mothers and daughters, the sisters and wives who inhabit these spaces. Thus, *Women's Voices from the Muslim World: A Short-Film Festival* was conceived.

The organization is now accepting submissions in short film format. The only substantive condition is the films must focus on women in the "Muslim world." The festival takes a broad definition of the subject -- women and girls of all faiths and background who are living in Muslim-majority countries and also Muslim women living as minorities elsewhere are all appropriate content. Importantly, filmmakers need *not* be women or Muslim: filmmakers of all backgrounds, genders, orientations and religious beliefs are invited to submit their work.

Unusually, submissions can be made on-line. Moreover, on October 4, Women's Voices Now launched the online element of the festival -- the first ten films to be accepted to the festival were made available on the Women's Voices Now website for anyone in the world to watch, rate, and comment upon. Thus, filmmakers can see the submissions of other contributors and the ratings of the international audience visiting the site before entries are formally judged by panels of experts in January 2011. In this way, filmmakers can enter into the spirit of inspiring competition and public support, and generate a unique and fascinating conversation.

The festival accepts submissions in four categories of film ranging from five to 30 minutes in length: documentary, fiction, experimental and student, and each is explained in detail on the site. The experimental category allows for silent films, animated films, stories recorded using mobile phones, and even music videos. A total of \$35,000 in cash prizes will be awarded to the winners in each category, to the winners of an Audience Choice Contest and to eight honorable mentions focused on the mother-child relationship and on girls in this Muslim world. Ultimately the real winners will be the women and girls portrayed. Through the work of largely unknown filmmakers, these invisible women and unseen girls will reach a new, and for many, a first, audience who truly wants to hear them, see them, know them and learn from them.

Similarly, online access to the submissions is admittedly a radical idea, but again, one with serious rationale. Rather than limit the viewing of these works to an elite Hollywood auditorium at the Los Angeles Film School, where the festival will premiere next spring



(March 10-12, 2011), Women's Voices Now seeks to level the platform -- innovatively following the network-to-viewer revolution instead of the traditional reverse relationship. Initial response already confirms the success of this movement. In its first three months, [Women's Voices Now](#) has already received film submissions from 23 countries on four continents and the submissions window remains open until November 24, 2010. So, whether you are seasoned filmmakers or novices -- camcorders, cell phones, Flip Cams to the ready! [Women's Voices Now](#) wants your submissions. Get filming and uploading.



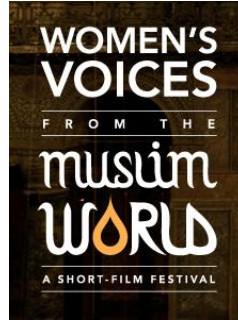


Women's Voices Now earned the honor of being a **Critic's Pick** in *Time Out:New York* for its event ***Women in Conflict: Iraq and Afghanistan***. Designed to provide perspective on women's lives in Afghanistan and Iraq, journalist Christina Asquith (*Sisters in War*) and humanitarian Manal Omar (*Barefoot in Baghdad*) read from their works, after which Afghani short films from The Women's Voices Now Film Festival: *Women's Voices from the Muslim World* were screened.

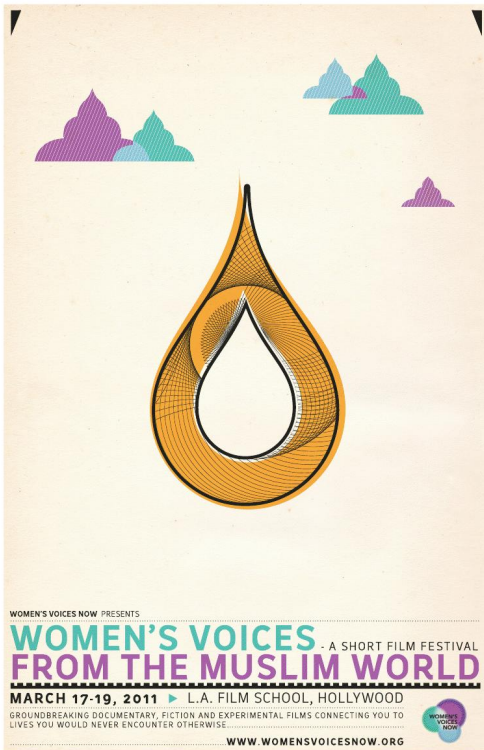


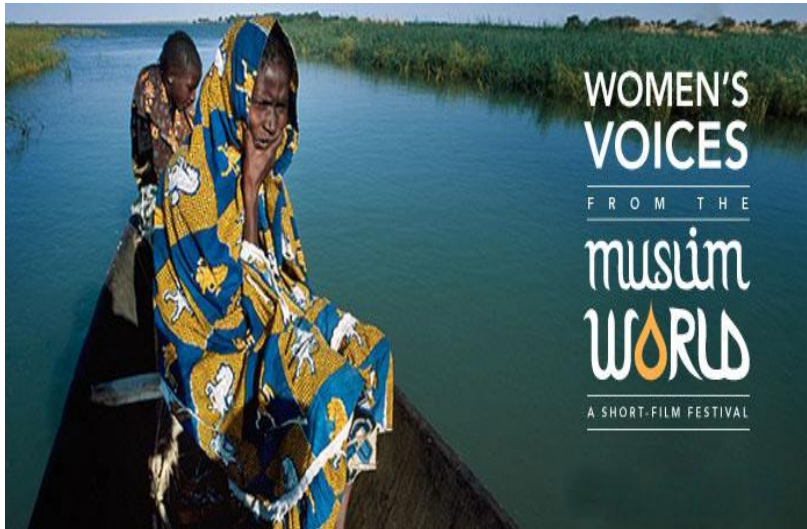
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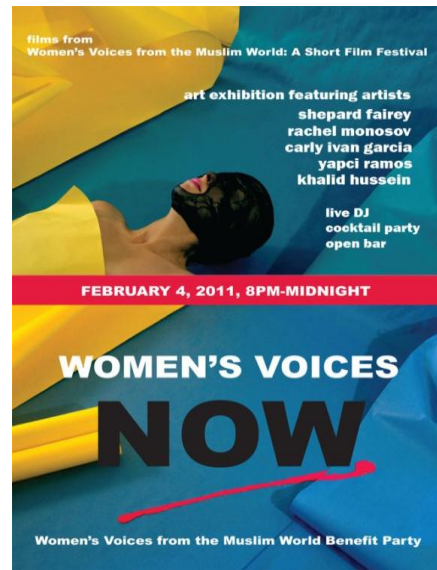
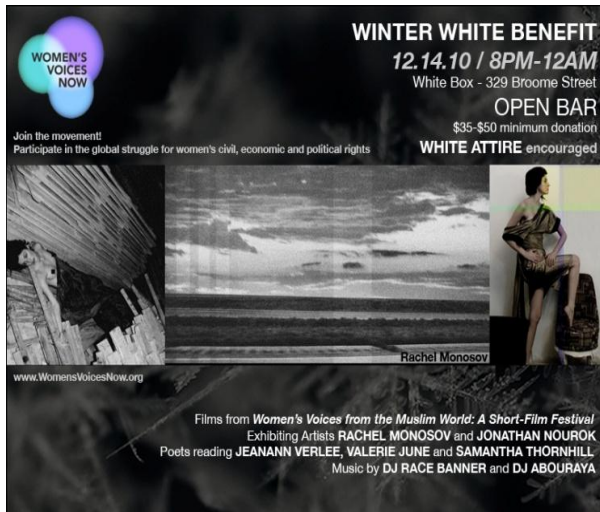


Posters:





Past Event Posters:



Event Photos Available upon request.



All photos and posters available on hi rez jpeg or tiff by request. Press Contact:





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