

Press Release

Amnesty International Film Award for *Paradise Now*

Berlin, 19 February 2005 – The feature film *Paradise Now* has won the Amnesty International Film Award at the 55th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale). The film by Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad which was awarded the 2,500 Euro prize was shown in the Berlinale's main *Competition* section.

"*Paradise now* is a short story about a major conflict – a tale with a moral, but not moralising; moving, but not sentimental", said the actress Nina Hoss, speaking on behalf of the Amnesty jury at the award ceremony for the Berlin Festival's independent jury awards. "It is a film which forces you to confront the issues, but is never pedantic. Its message is that every individual can make a difference."

In this Dutch-German-French-Israeli co-production, two Palestinians lose touch with one another in the run-up to carrying out a suicide attack. The friends must now each come to terms with their inner beliefs individually.

The film's achievement is to demonstrate that, even when trapped in the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence, individuals are free to make their own decisions and are always responsible for their own actions.

It is this realisation which persuades two of the three main characters to make a stand against violence. A female friend of the two protagonists believes from the very start in the need for a peaceful solution - even though she is the daughter of a well-known Palestinian combatant - and campaigns actively with a human rights organisation. Two men are selected to carry out a suicide attack: one is eventually dissuaded by this female friend and by the experiences of daily life. Of the other we learn that - due not only to the pressure exerted by the masterminds behind the attack, but also his own family background and the society in which he lives - nothing can counteract his determination to carry the plan through to its conclusion.

The film shows the sources on which inhumane violence feeds. The viewer is left with a feeling of horror at the circumstances leading to the violence but also with a sense of relief which comes from knowing that, in spite of this, individuals are under no obligation to descend further down this horrific spiral.

In addition to the Amnesty International Film Prize, the film won the "Blue Angel" for Best European Film, the Berlinale Audience Prize and the Berliner Morgenpost Readers' Prize. The film has now found a distribution company.

The Amnesty International Film Prize has previously been awarded at other international film festivals (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Copenhagen). Through the prize, Amnesty International hopes to promote awareness of human rights issues amongst film professionals and audiences and to persuade film-makers to devote new energy to this topic.