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A KATALYST PRODUCTIONS / FILM FX ZONE LTD RELEASE

Cutline:

In a country devastated by the horrors of war & poverty ... what hope is there for its children?

Logline:

1 million Afghans are estimated to be addicted to drugs, especially heroin. Alarming, 40% of these are women and children. "Addicted in Afghanistan" is an intimate feature-length observational documentary that explores the heartbreaking reality behind the headlines as seen through the eyes of Jabar & Zahir, two 15 year old drug addicts living in Kabul.

Synopsis:

Afghanistan is a country devastated by the horrors of war, crime, violence and poverty. It is also a country blighted with the cultivation and supply of opium. Although it is estimated that 95% of all heroin on the streets of the UK & Europe comes from Afghanistan, few talk of the drugs that stay within the country and the devastating effects it is having on its children - the youth & future of Afghanistan. After the war on Terror and the fall of the Taliban, what future is there for the next generation? Jabar and Zahir are two 15 year old friends, whose own sisters, mothers and fathers are also addicted to heroin and opium.

There is however hope in the form of state-run and private detox treatment centres - though desperately underfunded, they help to provide a band aid solution to the growing problem reaching epidemic proportions. In exclusive and unprecedented access to these detox centres, the film makers gained an insight into the patients, social workers and doctors treating what seems an insurmountable task.

"Addicted in Afghanistan" is a heart-breaking and uncompromising portrayal, filmed over a year, of the day to day struggles of a new generation of children fighting the new war in Afghanistan – the war on drugs.

In 2005, the UNODC estimated that 1 million people in Afghanistan are addicted to drugs (either heroin or opium). They discovered that 40% of these addicts are women and children. 60,000 of these are children under the age of 15. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN's special representative for Children in Armed Conflict, says Afghan children are the "forgotten victims" of three decades of war and violence. "I can't think of any country in the world where children suffer more than in Afghanistan," Ms Coomaraswamy said.

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is on the rise despite eradication efforts sponsored by the international community. "Afghanistan is increasingly hooked on its own drug," UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa said. Cultivating the poppy is Afghanistan's biggest industry and trading heroin accounts for 30% of its economy. According to the UN, 3 million Afghans are involved in growing opium – 12.6% of the country's population. The majority of the \$3 billion revenue goes to the war lords and

the Taliban who control the trade, while the farmers who grow it scrape only a bare subsistence (UN Office on Drugs and Crime).

This multi-award winning documentary was filmed over the course of a year in very dangerous circumstances single-handedly by the young Afghan film maker Jawed Taiman. Finding finance for the film was difficult and the Producer Sharron Ward exhausted many avenues including the traditional route of television commissions. In the end the film was granted development and completion funding from the Jan Vrijman Fund – of the world’s largest and most respected documentary film festival – the International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam (IDFA). The film also gained significant help in being selected to the Meet Market of the Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival (Sheffield Doc/Fest) where it also had its World Premiere in November 2009. It has since gone on to be selected for over 20 international film festivals including IDFA (where it was selected to compete in the Competition for First Appearance), Thessaloniki, Dokfest Munich, Reykjavik International Film Festival, Documenta Madrid, and was selected for the prestigious Documentary Fortnight at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

THE FILM MAKERS



JAWED TAIMAN DIRECTOR, CAMERA, SOUND, WRITER

Jawed Taiman was born in Kandahar, Afghanistan in 1981. He fled the turmoil of Afghanistan and moved to the United Kingdom to complete his education in 2002, and acquired his BA in Computer Animation from the University of Teesside, England. In 2005, he moved to France to attend EICAR, The International Film School of Paris and completed the BFA Film & Television Programme in 2006.

Whilst attending EICAR, Jawed directed the short fictional film “Zendan” (“Prison”) about Allam, a teacher who secretly educated girls in his home in Kabul. It was Broadcast on Tapes TV in the USA and was awarded Best Short Film, at EICAR Film School, Paris 2006. Zendan also screened at the Short Film Corner Cannes 2007.

He then relocated back to England to open Film FX Zone Ltd, a company dedicated to promoting Afghan music & media. Joining forces with Director and Producer Sharron Ward, Jawed made his first documentary “Addicted in Afghanistan.” Jawed is now based in Kabul working as a Producer/Reporter for Voice of America (VOA).



SHARRON WARD PRODUCER, CO-WRITER, CO-EDITOR

Sharron Ward is a New Zealand-born, London-based multi award-winning Director/Producer with credits for the BBC, MTV and VH1 amongst others. She has made short films for the BBC on Globalisation, Human Rights, and Eastern & Western politics and makes observational documentaries about social issues, human rights abuses & current affairs.

Her most recent films are “Cannes in a Van”, an observational documentary about guerilla film promoters at the 60th Cannes Film Festival - which premiered at the Short Film Corner, Festival de Cannes 2008; and “Facing the Dragon”, an observed documentary on crack and heroin addicts detoxing in a Buddhist monastery in Thailand.

She was a Producer on the “100 Greatest Series” on music luminaries for VH1 Europe and Directed and Produced the cult NZ arts/entertainment show ‘The Drum.’ She also won the New Zealand AIDS Media Award for her World AIDS Day Public Service Ad in 1997. Sharron is also a self-shooter on HDV and an editor. Her next project is “Alex, Cancer & Me,” an observed documentary about her husband Alex, a lung cancer patient and his struggle to overcome his terminal disease on the NHS in the UK. She set up Katalyst Productions in London with the mission to “make films that matter.”

JASON BROOKS

EDITOR

Jason is a camera operator, editor and website designer. He has a first class M.A. in Visual Anthropology from Goldsmiths College, University of London and a B.A. from Princeton University, New Jersey. His filmography includes “Time, Money and Change in South Sudan” - 20-minute ethnographic documentary film, shot on location in East Africa; “Ways of Life” – a feature documentary, shot in Maramures, Romania; and “Al Quds Underground” a feature documentary, filmed in Jerusalem, Palestine.

MAIN CREDITS

Main Cast: Jabar & Zahir
Written by Jawed Taiman & Sharron Ward
Editor Jason Brooks
Additional Editor Sharron Ward
Online Editor Nigel Taylor
Title Design Jason Brooks
Music Elias Shahna & Deen Mohammed Ghamkhar
Sound Adrian Scott
Produced by Sharron Ward
Filmed & Directed by Jawed Taiman
This documentary has been realised with the kind support of the Jan Vrijman Fund,
IDFA.

UK/Afghanistan/Netherlands / HDV / Digibeta PAL / 78 mins / In Dari, Pashto & Farsi
with English Subtitles / Colour

FILM FESTIVALS TO DATE

World Premiere, Sheffield Doc/Fest 2009
International Premiere, IDFA – First Appearance Competition 2009
Watchdocs Human Rights Film Festival Poland 2009
Asian First Film Festival December 2009
Documentary Fortnight Museum of Modern Art New York City 2010
Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival March 2010
ECU – European Independent Film Festival, Paris March 2010
The Drugs and Harm Reduction Film Festival, Liverpool April 2010
Honolulu International Film Festival 2010
Al Jazeera International Documentary Film Festival, Doha Qatar April 2010
The Norwegian International Documentary Film Festival April 2010
DokFest Munich, May 2010
Documenta Madrid May 2010
Milan International Film Festival May 2010
The Las Vegas International Film Festival June 2010
Afghanistan Alive! Film Archiv Austria June 2010
Yerevan International Film Festival July 2010
Spotlight on Afghanistan, DokuFest Kosovo July 2010
Reykjavik International Film Festival, Iceland Sept 2010
Docs DF Film Festival, Mexico City, Sept 2010

BROADCAST SALES TO DATE

Sold to Denmark DR 2 TV 2010, Mette Hoffman Meyer

AWARDS TO DATE

Best Director of Documentary Award, Asian First Film Festival, Singapore 2009

Best European Documentary Feature Award, ECU – European Independent Film Festival, Paris March 2010

Aloha Accolade Award for Excellence in Filmmaking, Honolulu International Film Festival 2010

Golden Ace Award for Excellence in Filmmaking, Las Vegas International Film Festival 2010

Nominated Best Documentary Film, Milan International Film Festival 2010

Golden Palm Award, Mexico International Film Festival 2010

Shortlisted for Grierson Best Newcomer Award, 2010

PUBLICITY QUOTES

“A heartbreaking glimpse into the daily life of Afghani children who are addicted to drugs” – IDFA Programmer

“Director Jawed Taiman deftly illustrates the vicious cycle of addiction and the devastation it wreaks on families. Thank god for this kind of insightful, courageous filmmaking. This is a story that doesn’t get on the news every night. But it bloody well should.” - Hussain Currimbhoy, Sheffield Doc/Fest Programmer

“Riveting” - Talha Burki, The Lancet

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)62010-9/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)62010-9/fulltext)

“The state of poverty in Afghanistan is a striking and heart-breaking feature of the film.”

“The film was gripping from its very first scene.”

- Fiza Social Media Blogger

http://chowrangji.blogspot.com/2010_03_01_archive.html

“This is an intimate, sometimes unbearably, close observation of a ‘lost generation’ searching for their way out of the quagmire of addiction.”

– Dokfest Munich programmer

Reviewed by UK Film Critic Karl French on Cinepolitics & I/v with Sharron Ward – Press TV Iran:

<http://www.presstv.ir/programs/detail.aspx?sectionid=3510516&id=129266#129266%20>

Interview of Director Jawed Taiman & Producer Sharron Ward on BBC World Service:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2010/03/100308_addicted_in_afghanistan.shtml

Director Jawed Taiman talks about "Addicted" on IDFA TV
<http://www.idfa.nl/industry/idfa-tv/interviews/event.aspx?id=6749ed31-971c-4f31-9fef-d710efa4b5fc>
<http://blogs.mcclatchydc.com/kabul/2010/02/addicted-in-afghanistan.html>

Addicted in Afghanistan was in the "Top 10 most watched docs" at IDFA 2009
<http://www.idfa.nl/industry/markets-funding/vrijman-fund/latestnews/jan-vrijman-fund-film-wins-the-vpro-idfa-award.aspx>

IDFA's Docs for Sale

In the Top 10 most watched films at Docs for Sale are listed three Jan Vrijman Fund films, *Last Train Home*, *Sins of My Father* and *Addicted in Afghanistan* by Jawed Taiman. *Addicted in Afghanistan* is an intimate portrait of the teenagers Jabar and Zahir, two of the more than one million drug addicts in Afghanistan.

In total 476 documentaries were selected to participate in Docs for Sale, IDFA's leading marketplace for creative documentaries, also offering streaming video all year round.

Behind the Scenes

Many of the funds films were picked up by festivals during IDFA and will circulate the festival circuit in 2010.

Just after IDFA finished **Sundance** unveiled their programme for the 2010 edition, including *Last Train Home* and *Sins of My Father*.

Addicted in Afghanistan which had its International Premiere at IDFA already won its first award for Best Documentary Director at the Asian First Film Festival in Singapore. Director Jawed Taiman is especially happy that the film raises awareness around the World about such an important issue such as children drug addiction in Afghanistan. "That's the real award for me and my team".



Jabar, Addicted in Afghanistan



Satar, Jabar's Father



Jabar & Zahir



Social Worker Naderi & Sabera – Zahir's mother



Jawed Taiman filming Addicted in Afghanistan



Producer Sharron Ward Photo Credit: Motion Team
All other photos Credit: Katalyst Productions Ltd

FAQs

What does Jabar mean in the film when he says that the Americans are to blame for their addiction?

Jawed Taiman – What Jabar means is that during the rule of the Taliban – their leader Mullah Omar one night made an edict over the radio that Sharia law forbade the use of opium and drugs – and overnight production and consumption of opium virtually stopped. With the fall of the Taliban thanks to the American invasion, the use of drugs has skyrocketed. He is not necessarily condoning the Taliban but is trying to point out that during their rule drug addiction was not a wide scale problem.

Where is all the money going from the NGOs – isn't their enough money pouring in from all around the world to help the drug addicts?

JT – Unfortunately due to the massive corruption in Afghanistan the money sent from overseas just isn't getting to the people who really need it. The NGOs & the Government departments all have very nice bullet proof armoured cars, and plasma screens, nice offices and that is where I see the money going.

What is Karzai doing about the problem of drug addiction in Afghanistan?

JT – It is widely and commonly known in Afghanistan that Hamid Karzai and his brother Ahmed Wali Karzai are complicit in the drug trade. Everyone calls their homes and that of government officials as “Poppy Palaces” – their homes were bought with the profits of the drug trade. The level of corruption in Afghanistan and particularly in the Government is sickening. Even the Wall Street Journal made an investigation into this. There is much show for the media of “burning opium fields” but as soon as the cameras and the media circus have left, the fires are extinguished and everything returns to normal.

What is the standard treatment for drug addicts in Afghanistan and how long does the treatment take?

JT – Unfortunately the standard treatment is in a detox centre for 2 weeks. As there is very little rehabilitation once the patients come out of detox treatment, there are no half way houses or rehabilitation centres, so often they end up going back to the same places and relapse almost straight away.

What can we do to help stop the production of opium?

JT – Afghan farmers desperately need to make a living. New agriculture exports like Afghan pomegranates are showing promise and the more the West buys Afghan pomegranates the more Afghan farmers will grow them instead of poppies.

The situation seems so desperate and bleak – is there any hope?

There are many institutions in Afghanistan and in the West who work admirably to help Afghan addicts. Some of these organizations and institutions include Dr Khetab Khakar the Director of SJA (Sayed Jamaludine Afghan) the private detox hospital that appears in the film. The social workers in the film come from a wonderful women's & children's detox centre called Sanga Omaj that is funded by the Columbia Programme, which also features in the film. Other organizations include Afghan Action – www.Afghanaction.org.uk and www.afghanaction.com who work to provide Afghan kids with jobs carpet weaving featured in the documentary. There is also the Afghan Child Education & Care Organization (AFCECO) www.afceco.org and the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) as well as USAID who are all playing their part.

What's different about this film and other films on Afghanistan?

Sharron Ward - So much has been said and filmed about Afghanistan, but rarely do we get to see the story from Afghans themselves. I've seen many films on Afghanistan and this film gives such a unique insight into the real day to day life of young Afghans it is quite astounding. I chose to work with Jawed specifically because as a film maker myself concerned with developing countries and particularly with children, I'm tired of seeing white Western film makers going into a country they really know very little about. They don't speak the language; they have no idea of the religion or of the nuances of the culture, so it's very difficult to get the true picture.

JT – For me I have seen quite a few films made on Afghanistan and when you know the dialect and you speak the language I can tell they are play acting, they are not being real - they are putting it on for the camera. Also Afghans are very proud people and drug addiction in particular is a real cultural shame so it was very difficult at first to get people to talk about their addiction. It took a lot of time sitting with them without my camera and just getting to know them.

I was also in the unique position being Afghan that I was able to get co-operation from the Afghan Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Afghan Ministry of Health, the Kabul Police Commissioner, and the President of Afghan Film and also through the office of the President of Afghanistan. I was even warned one day to avoid the Ministry of Culture and that day a suicide bomber attacked. It was a very dangerous (and still is) a dangerous place to be. It makes me very sad to see the state of my nation.

How long did it take to make the film?

SW - The film took around 2 ½ years to make from development, to filming, to post production. We made the decision early on to self-distribute the film as this is such a low-budget film we made it for about a third of what normal documentary budgets are. We didn't have a TV commission; we didn't have a distribution deal, or a co-production deal. We just got some small funding from IDFA and went out and made it. We felt the issue and the characters were so strong we just had to do it even if it meant self-funding it in the meantime, which is largely what we did for a while.

Why did you choose to focus only on the boys and not on the wider issues and context of addiction in Afghanistan?

SW – We made a very conscious decision to focus on the microcosm of the two characters and to gain what we hope is a valuable and eye-opening insight into what it's really like to be addicted in Afghanistan, and to show what everyday life is like for these two boys. The personal is political and by showing their lives in minute and sometimes visceral detail, we hope that the film raises more questions than it answers and that the film provides a starting point for discussion. We also didn't want to get side tracked with the wider political context because we didn't want their experience and their story to get lost.

Jawed was not an objective observer in the film – how difficult was it for him to film the boys and to watch them take drugs?

JT – It was extremely hard as it was my first experience being in contact with drug addicts, let alone actually filming them. As it's my first documentary also I did find it difficult keeping an objective distance and I actually decided early on to become somewhat involved. I genuinely wanted to help Jabar & Zahir – but of course you cannot "help" drug addicts change, they have to want to change themselves and I did find it very frustrating at times, particularly with Jabar going in and out of detox.

What has happened to Jabar, Zahir and their families now?

As of May 2010, Sabera (Zahir's mother) and Gulparee (Zahir's sister) are now clean. Mahmood - Zahir's older brother found them in Kabul and helped them get treated. Zahir ran away to Herat province, and was caught stealing and is now in jail in Herat. Jabar's whereabouts are currently unknown.

For Screener/Interview Requests please contact: Sharron Ward –
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