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Silencing art

Lebanese authorities blocked the screening of *The Silent Majority*, a 2010 documentary on Iran's Green Movement.



BEIRUT – Lebanese authorities stopped the Cultural Resistance International Film Festival from screening a documentary on Iran's Green Movement over the weekend, sparking condemnation.

“*The Silent Majority Speaks*, the admirable visual essay of filmmaker Bani Khoshnoudi, has been censored in Beirut,” the film festival organizers said in a [statement](#).

The film, which was originally scheduled to be shown Saturday evening in Beirut's Metropolis Theater, could not be screened after "the Censorship Committee served notice to the festival's organizers that it was banned for insulting a foreign country," according to the statement.

The Silent Majority Speaks, released in 2010, tackles the 2009-2010 "Green Movement" against Iran's ruling authorities, following the contested reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the country's president in 2009.

The 93-minute documentary compiles handheld camera and cell phone footage from the mass protests, which were violently put down by Iranian security forces, as well as documentary footage of past demonstrations.

Lebanese authorities prevented the screening of *Green Days*, another Iranian film covering the Green Movement, in 2011.

The Beirut International Film Festival's "Forbidden Films Festival" was slated to air the film that summer, but General Security withdrew the organizer's permit to screen the movie, which included footage of the Iranian protests.

Condemnation

The festival blasted the move to block the screening, saying it portrayed Lebanon in a bad light.

"The organizers of the festival protest this ban, which risks depicting Lebanon as a backwards and unenlightened country in the eyes of the international community."

The Beirut-based Media Against Violence NGO, which campaigns against censorship, echoed the organizers' criticism of the ban.

"The NGO sees this behavior as a persistent attack on civil liberties in Lebanon," the group said in a statement released Monday morning.

Media Against Violence added that the censorship "links Beirut to Tehran by turning the Lebanese state into a subsidiary of the Iranian state under Syria."

Hezbollah, whose top foreign patron is Iran, has strong political sway over General

Security, which oversees censorship in Lebanon.

The group called on “on the government, and the political forces concerned with Lebanon’s image... to move quickly to intervene in this case, make sure the film is shown and prevent Lebanon turning from a democratic state in to a dictatorial state.”

Censorship bureaucracy

Festival organizers were prevented from screening *The Silent Majority Speaks* due to a bureaucratic maneuver, not a decision to ban the movie outright.

According to the director of Samir Kassir Eyes (SKeyes), an NGO working to monitor violations of free press and expression, General Security referred the film to the Movie Censorship Committee, starting an administrative procedure that could not be completed before the end of the festival.

“General Security’s press office said that it had not banned the movie. It referred it to the committee, which has not met yet. The interior minister is the only person who has the right to ban the movie,” Aymann Mhanna told NOW.

“We have spoken in the past with Interior Minister Nohad Mashnouq and with several counselors in the interior ministry, and they have confirmed that Mashnouq had pledged not to ban any movie for any reason, even if the committee recommended its ban.”

However, any official decision not to ban the movie would likely come too late for festival organizers, as the festival ends Monday, leaving little if any time for the Movie Censorship Committee to meet and make a decision.

“If the committee does not meet before the festival ends, the movie will not be screened because it would not have a permit,” Mhanna explained.