

RISE AND SHINE
CINEMA

LAST MEN IN ALEPPO

(Dt. Titel: DIE LETZTEN MÄNNER VON ALEPPO)

- A documentary film directed by Feras Fayyad

Co-director and editor: Steen Johannessen



WINNER SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2017
WORLD CINEMA DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION



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Kinoverleih: Rise And Shine Cinema

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Denmark / Germany / Syria, 2017

Duration: 104 min

Produced by Larm Film and Aleppo Media Center In co-production with Kloos & Co Medien and SWR in association with ARTE and DR, SVT, YLE and NRK.

With the support of Danish Film Institute, DANIDA, Nordic Film & TV Fond, AFAC, Cinereach, Idfa Bertha Foundation, Sundance Institute, Open Society Foundations, JustFilms, IMS.

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SYNOPSIS

After five years of war in Syria, the remaining citizens of Aleppo are getting ready for a siege. We follow the volunteers from The White Helmets as they experience the daily life of death and struggle in the streets of the city. They fight for sanity in a place where war has become the norm.

Khaled, Subhi and Mahmoud are among the first to enter the destroyed buildings, scouring through the rubble in search of bodies and signs of life. They now live more or less under siege and constant bombings, together with the remaining 350.000 civilians in Aleppo. They all struggle with the same dilemma: Should they flee and bring their families to safety, or should they stay and fight for their city?

The film takes place from September 2015 until the fall of 2016.

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PRODUCTION NOTES:

Last men in Aleppo is produced in close collaboration between Larm Film in Copenhagen and Aleppo Media Center (AMC). The Syrian director, Feras Fayyad started *Last Men in Aleppo* with Aleppo Media Center and then teamed up with the Danish co-director and editor Steen Johannessen.

Director Feras Fayyad has previously documented The White Helmets' work in a film about their leader, Raed Saleh. Therefore, he already had extensive knowledge of the organisation, including a close relationship with its leadership as well as several of the volunteers.

With the idea of making a new film about White Helmets, Feras Fayyad met with International Media Support (IMS) consultant Henrik Grunnet in 2014 to develop the production, after this Feras started working with AMC.

AMC is a group of young men from Aleppo, who in 2012 picked up their cameras and started documenting the bombing of their city. They posted their footage online for the world to see what was really happening. AMC is supported by IMS in Denmark. IMS put AMC and Feras Fayyad in contact with the producer Søren Steen Jespersen (Larm Film). This led to a meeting in September 2015 in Gaziantep on the Turkish side of the border, where Steen Johannessen was included in the team as editor. This meeting led to the collaboration on the film, *Last Men in Aleppo*.

The title was chosen by Feras to stress the importance of the relationship between the humanitarian workers and their fight for their city.

Feras Fayyad has on a daily basis directed AMC photographers as well as participants in the film. In February 2016 Feras Fayyad and Steen Johannessen agreed on their responsibilities in the film as director and co-director.

The recordings were uploaded through out 2016 via an uplink high-speed internet connection to Feras Fayyad and Steen Johannessen, who then edited the film, while Søren Steen Jespersen was working to finance the film. Working with the characters in the stressful war environment has been a challenge for Feras Fayyad. During shooting he was in constant dialogues with the cinematographers to form the style and vision of the film. This work together with the cinematographers insistence has made it possible to follow the our characters in Aleppo on a daily basis for more than a year. Whereas the world's news media only has been able to report from the city sporadically, and over short periods of time, due to the war and the risk of kidnappings, the team of AMC photographers have been on the ground the entire time. Their extensive knowledge of daily life in the city, including their relationship to the characters appearing in the film, has provided us with a unique opportunity to accurately portray life during siege and war.

To avoid confusion, we would like you to make note of the following:

The film is directed by Feras Fayyad. Co-director: Steen Johannessen

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS

By director Feras Fayyad

We are here to share our story that's we make it in blood and bone, we are here because we believed in the role of the film and arts to get attention for Just causes.

The peaceful Syrian uprising of 2011 gradually developed into an armed conflict, after the regime chose to respond with a military solution. In Aleppo, rebels seized control of major parts of the city, and the regime continued to target civilians with barrel bombs and aircrafts. The war in Syria transformed into a dark hole that began destroying the civilian population, and the line between good and evil became blurred. Everyone is behaving in a Machiavellian way, thus compromising principles and ethics in their efforts to achieve their goals. Therefore, the civilians were glad to put their trust and confidence in one group of people that differ from the various actors in the Syrian civil war.

They are a part of the civil defense, and in the international community they are known as the The White Helmets. In Aleppo 2013, I had my first encounter with this group: I saw them running in the direction of a barrel bomb that had just been dropped. The whole group was running for the sake of saving the largest amount of civilians possible.

Shortly after, one of the most explosive barrel bombs fell down and The White Helmets lost many of their colleagues. This was one of the most important moments that came to determine the fate of the different personalities in the film, as they became more determined to continue their work to save the victims. I was attracted by their ability to turn the loss into motivation for continuing to search for life under the rubble. This made me think a lot more about the transmission and relaying of the nature of this war, as seen through the eyes of these people. A lack of appreciation for their work and offerings must be prevented. I also had a desire to explore their inner psychological and mental world in order to understand the struggles that they lived through in those moments of their lives. Also, it was a chance to be able to relay the repulsiveness of the war in Syria and to raise questions regarding rising extremism, revenge and the value and dignity of the human being. What also emerged was the subject of the role and importance of international law in the persecution of war criminals and being able to hold them accountable for their actions, and also to explore their role in creating the roots of extremism, terrorism and mass killings.

I think this film is made out of the captured moments that documentary film making produces – the reality and that which gives an artistic form to the absurdity of war. Our proximity to the film's characters allows us to explore the value of time. The moment of humanity is the moment that Khaled Horah, our main character, extends his hand to save the victim from under the debris. It looks exactly like Michelangelo's painting, 'The Creation of Adam'. It is a moment that is full of basic human values and calls for a closer examination of the horror of war and the value of the human touch, our relationships and ourselves. Also, our role and inspirations in the question of peace and humanity needed to face big challenges such as terrorism, isolation and nationalist, political and religious extremism.

This film is a story about hope, and it is an attempt to study our human roots, our affiliations and our collective tasks in situations that require us to take control of our lives when faced with a mindless, irrational killer. It is a tool for understanding forgiveness and overcoming vengeance. I can see this when our heroes save all the

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victims, even those who caused their deaths. It is also a tool in the search for the meaning of life, as it inspires you to look closely at your own gift of life so that another can live. Hopefully the film can become an opportunity for The White Helmets to become acknowledged in the world and thus give them the attention that they deserve. Covering their efforts will also give us the opportunity to portray the Syrian civil war, in the hope that it can motivate people and make them take action to stop this ongoing tragedy and thus make an effort to create peace in Syria, or at least help the people who are asking for help. War brings out the worst in human beings, but it also brings out the best in us. The White Helmets are indeed a living example of that.

By co-director Steen Johannessen

The creation of *Last Men in Aleppo* has been a transcending experience for everyone involved, a long journey into darkness.

We want to give these men a voice, there is a story here that should be told.

The war in Syria has been on the front pages for many years now, and there has been a lot of pressure to get the footage out and to finish the film fast.

Every day I followed the fate of Aleppo as it was slowly moving towards the fall that is now a reality. Every day new atrocities were documented in the material that our story is created from. As uploads kept coming in, the feeling of powerlessness and a growing sense of anger has been pounding inside me. What if this material could actually make a difference to the people I learned to care for while working with them? Did we not have a duty to bring their stories out right now, so it would make a difference? Could it change the course of history and the fate of the civilians in Aleppo? What kept us on track was the frustrations of our partners from Aleppo Media Center, who for years now have filmed civilians being bombed. They have uploaded the footage to CNN, Reuters and Youtube – made press statements, acted as reporters in front of the camera, made campaign videos for people to see their misery, used all the tricks in the book to make the world realise what was happening in Aleppo. But apparently no one is listening, because the bombs keep falling. They were so very tired of this, and this is how we got together, to try to tell their story in a long format – a film. And I hope that the film can be a prime example of what film making can do where journalism has failed. Because when it comes to Syria, journalism has failed, and something needs to be done.

With my background and experience as film editor of many hot issue political nonfiction films, my drive is to understand the reality of what the story is about. Saying that Syria is very complicated has become a sad excuse for not acting. So I have tried, and I am still trying, to grasp the complexities of a country and a war that keeps evolving and keeps surprising me. 12 years ago I spent four months in Syria working on a film there. I travelled the country but never got to see Aleppo. Now I feel I have been there in its most desperate time.

My biggest surprise in making the film has been to follow the cooperation between my talented director, Feras Fayyad, and our photographers from Aleppo Media Center. Fadi, Hassan and Thaer have grown tremendously in their work, guided by the instructions from Feras. What they have accomplished in making this film has my deepest respect on all levels. There have been many obstacles, and looking through the material that they uploaded has been a painful pleasure. If you see the film, you will understand. I hope that what we together

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have created will help them in their lives and careers.

From my side, a lot of anger about the situation has been channeled into making the film. I think this can be felt when you watch it. We hope to lure you into seeing something that you would normally turn your eyes away from. We have done so by using the whole toolbox of film making – all of our skills – to tell an important story.

We want you to see. We want you to come very close, and you will get bruised on the way. It is not an easy journey, but it is real.

Notes from the production:

September 27, 2015 – Gaziantep, Turkey

The whole team is here: Feras, Kareem, Søren, Fadi, Thaer, Hassan and Mojahed. They are ecstatic, always laughing and making jokes. Hassan shows me a recording on his mobile phone: they were shot at while crossing the border illegally, the bullets are whistling over their heads. To attend a workshop – this is all new to me.

The workshop is nearing its end: discussions and evaluations about the material that has already been shot. Who should we follow with the camera? - Storyline, characters, new friends and partners. Cultural gaps: different roads, but shared goals. They are tired of the endless reporting that they have been doing. We look at each other, each declaring what we want with this not-yet-made film. An atmosphere of seriousness fills the room – to me it feels like a promise.

May 4, 2016 – Copenhagen, Denmark

My wife has just left for work. I make coffee on the espresso machine and get comfortable in front of the computer, getting ready for today's work.

1. Search Aleppo on Twitter for live updates, what is the news, the ceasefire has collapsed completely, who is fighting who? Links to videos coming out of Aleppo – are our characters in any of the news reports, details of bomb runs: barrel, incendiary, cluster munitions, “bunker buster”, is everyone safe?
2. Search Aleppo on Youtube. Aleppo Media Center, Aleppo Today, regime propaganda, Russian litter. Death, death and more death. Story about chemical weapons, can it be verified?
3. Look through today's upload from our photographers. Anything interesting: action, talk, driving.
4. Messenger with Feras.
5. Export material to translators and upload, check for new translations. Surprised at what they are actually saying.

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6. Editing new scene. Re-watch already edited scene. Try something. The kids are home early from school. I close the computer while they are in the kitchen.

August 12, 2016 – Copenhagen, Denmark

We have just learned about it: Khaled is dead. Everyone in the office is experiencing turmoil. Feras is destroyed. From what we hear, the Syrian civil defense has not been able to get his body out of the rubble because the area he was killed in is now a war zone. There is a short-lived hope that he is not actually dead. It goes into my bones: I have lived with this guy, watching hours and hours of footage.

The strange feeling that I have had before, as film editor, of intimately knowing your characters without ever having met them physically or even talked to them.

January 1, 2017 – Gaziantep, Turkey

I meet Kareem, Fadi, Thaer, and Mojahed again. More than a year has gone by, and what a year – so rough. I have seen a fraction of what they have seen and it has changed me. I look at them: they look like men now, so changed. They are here to watch the film and discuss it. We truly hope that they will like it. Mahmoud, Subhi and Nagieb, our subjects, have also crossed the border to see the film. It is very moving to see them watching it. I feel used and empty, happy and sad.

Messages from the heart by the Last Men In Aleppo

After two years of working on *Last Men In Aleppo*, Mahmoud and Nagieb had survived, and they were able to watch the film. They cried a lot over their city, their lives and loved ones that they left behind, all the bodies still stuck under the ruins. But they were happy their story, now in the form of a film, will convey what they have lived through and suffered in a long and bitter struggle with the war and its brutality.

Below, the heroes of *Last Men In Aleppo* have sent their messages, via director Feras Fayyad, to those who will watch the film. These messages are conveying the result of six years of war in Syria: normal people whose lives were directly affected by the war were forced to leave their city, their houses and lives.

The current situation for the characters:

- Khaled's wife and his two daughters, Israa and Batoul, left Aleppo immediately after he was killed. Now they are stuck on the border in Syria in a tragic situation. The mother is struggling to secure a better life for her two daughters.
- Israa and Batoul need to continue their studies.

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- Nagieb and Mahmoud and other White Helmets forces left their city together with their families. After leaving the city, they received death threats and now Nagieb and Mahmoud are in Turkey. Nagieb is far away from his family, trying to get them out of Syria.
- Mahmoud and his brother now live with their family. They are trying to improve their situation in Turkey.
- Mahmoud wants to continue his studies.

Khaled Omar Herreh:

This is the last message that Khaled Harah left for the director of the film, Feras Fayyad:

“My city is a red line. I will not leave it, even if it means I will get killed. My biggest fear concerns my daughters Israa and Batoul and my wife: I want them to be okay until this war is over, so I always can be by their side.

Ps: you can google his name to get to know him better.

Nagieb:

I am Nagieb. I am 31 years old and I have three kids. They are my only hope and reason to continue with this life.

I want to tell you that we are not okay after we were forced to flee Aleppo. I have no home and no job. My life is a mess.

I lost my close friend Khaled, and that was my biggest loss. I cried a lot and hated the war more and more. I hope that you will feel solidarity with our pain and our just case.

I am not a politician, and I have nothing to do with politics. I rescue people. Look, I really do not wish for anybody to live this disaster. No one should lose a close friend like I did.

I just hope that all of you, who will see me in this film, will stand together with us to stop this ugly war. Help us to not be attacked any more.

Mahmoud:

I am Mahmoud. I am 29 years old. I completed my sports studies and started studying philosophy. Later, I turned out to be a rescue man. I had to quit my studies and lost my normal life.

This war has made me 80 years old. I love life, just like you, and because I love life, I decided to save lives.

I hate weapons because I know them very well. And I hate their role in life. Because of them, we all lose. The biggest sin of the human being is to use weapons in order to gain power.

I share my story with you in this film, because I believe that you will feel solidarity with us in our struggle for justice.

What we want is to stop the war: stop forced displacement, stop targeting the workers in the humanitarian sector and keep them safe from war.

We are not fighters – we are rescue workers.

ABOUT LARM FILM:

Larm Film is an independent production company founded by Søren Steen Jespersen in 2010. We produce documentary films and television that in one way or another deals with people and the world. We co-produced

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the film, “Words Matter” by Helle Hansen in 2012, a provocative film that deals with the tone and development of the Danish immigration debate.

In 2014 we produced “The Carbon Crooks” by director Tom Heinemann. We have produced journalistic programmes television for DR and TV2 Denmark and are currently in production with the documentary, “Russian Sky” by Anita M. Hopland and Jens Lengerke. We also have several other documentaries in development/production.

ABOUT ALEPPO MEDIA CENTER, AMC:

From the outset, AMC intended to cover the events taking place in Aleppo city in an accurate way by focusing on the everyday concerns of the Syrian citizens. In addition to the coverage of massacres and breaches, the team wanted to document the names of the daily victims via photos, videos and news broadcast, all characterised by a strong sense of ethics.

AMC relies on a large network of correspondents, spread out over different parts of the city, equipped with walkie-talkie handsets to ensure the fastest possible news reporting.

AMC believes that accuracy and neutrality is the bedrock of any successful media agency. Thus AMC wanted to emulate international agencies by assigning the various parts of the media production process to different sections. Furthermore, AMC has allowed every section to have independence within the limits of the press charter of honour, which is approved by AMC, and the charter of AMC itself, which sets out the general guidelines for the centre’s policies and directions. The AMC’s charter is derived from the Syrian revolution goals, which are liberty, justice and maintaining a neutral stance, non-aligned to any political, ideological or military power.

AMC has an internal system that determines the general policy of the centre and defines the relationship between the centre and the rest of the revolutionary forces in all its forms. It provides those who are working on the ground with an objective and professional framework, which ensures commitment to ethical and professional standards.

ABOUT KLOOS & CO. MEDIEN:

KLOOS & CO. MEDIEN is one of the most active German production companies for international coproductions for cinema and TV. Recent award-winning films and current coproductions of Kloos & Co. Medien include: LAST MEN IN ALEPPO, BUGS, I DIDN’T CROSS THE BORDER – THE BORDER CROSSED ME, HOLY COW, TRANSIT HAVANA, WALKING UNDER WATER, YOU DRIVE ME CRAZY, GANGSTER OF LOVE, THE OTHER CHELSEA, AWAY FROM ALL SUNS and others.

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BIOGRAPHIES:

Note to the press – when writing about the film – please write as follows:

The film is directed by Feras Fayyad. Co-director and editor: Steen Johannessen.

Director, Feras Fayyad:

Feras Fayyad is an award-winning filmmaker, Feras Fayyad was twice held by Bashar Assad's intelligence because of his film "On other side". He studied film making and arts and has directed and edited several films, both documentary, and fiction.

He has participated in international film festivals and received recognition for his work about contemporary Syrian issues and the political transformation in the Arab world, he started worked on his film "Last Men In Aleppo" from two years, and his Previous films include "Behind The white color", "My Escape".

Co-director, Steen Johannessen:

Steen Johannessen has worked for many years as an acclaimed editor of Danish and international award-winning documentary films. The list includes films like "Motleys Law", "Miners Shot Down", "Warriors from the North" and "Putin's Kiss".

This is his debut as a co-director.

Producer, Søren Jespersen

Søren Steen Jespersen graduated as a journalist from the National School of Journalism, 1993.

Worked at Nordisk Film TV from 1993-2000 as reporter, director, editor-in-chief and producer.

Co-founder of Bastard Film in 2000. Producer and CEO until 2009.

Founder of Larm Film in October 2010. CEO, producer and director.

Producer and editor-in-chief on several award-winning films, including the documentary film "69" that won New Nordic Voices award at Nordic Panorama and CPH:DOX in 2008 and the feature length documentary "The Invisible Gang" that won a Danish Bodil Award in 2010.

Director of the 2014 documentary, "Warriors from the North" together with Nasib Farah. Selected for IDFA competition 2014 and winner of Hotdocs' mid-length documentary award 2015 and One World Student Jury Award, Prague, 2015.

Producer, Kareem abeed

Age 30 years – Syrian citizenship – a graduate of the Institute of Mechanical Engineering and electricity from the city of Aleppo.

A career in journalism beginning of the year 2012.

He worked on the coverage of the events since the beginning of the Syrian revolution. After that he founded the conglomerate of activists and journalists, called the Aleppo Media Center. At the end of 2013 he served as a member of the Board of Directors of Aleppo Media Center.

Co-Producer, Stefan Kloos

Stefan Kloos (*1968) is the managing director of both, the documentary distribution company RISE AND SHINE WORLD SALES and KLOOS & CO. MEDIEN, one of the most active German production companies for international coproductions for cinema and TV. Kloos is a Grimme Award-winner, a member of the German Film Academy and of the European Film Academy. He is a member of EDN and AG DOK and an alumni of the

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DOCUMENTARY CAMPUS MASTERSCHOOL. He has a strong track record as a creative producer on international documentaries and regularly teaches and tutors internationally on documentary film production and distribution.

CREDIT LIST:

Directed by:

Feras Fayyad

Co-director:

Steen Johannessen

Director of Photography:

Fadi al Halabi

مدير الإضاءة والتصوير
فادي الحلبي

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Thaer Mohammed

Mojahed Abo Aljood

Editors:

Steen Johannessen

Michael Bauer

Sound design:

Morten Groth Brandt

Idea:

Feras Fayyad

Development:

Henrik Grunnet and Aleppo Media Center

Composer:

Karsten Fundal

Score performed by:

F.A.M.E'S Orchestra

Producers:

Søren Steen Jespersen

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Kareem Abeer
Stefan Kloos

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International Sales: DR Sales

www.larmfilm.dk

www.amc-sy.net

LINK TO PRESS PHOTOS:

<http://www.riseandshine-berlin.de/aleppo/>

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