

# Oscar-nominated Palestinian filmmaker detained at Los Angeles airport

Kevin Martinez  
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Emad Burnat, the Palestinian co-director of *5 Broken Cameras*, nominated for a best feature-length documentary by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, was detained by US immigration officials on arrival at Los Angeles International Airport before last week's Oscar ceremony. Burnat, travelling with his wife and eight-year-old son, was threatened with deportation before being allowed into the United States.

In a statement released through his film's distributor, Kino Lorber, Burnat explained: "Last night, on my way from Turkey to Los Angeles, CA, my family and I were held at US immigration for about an hour and questioned about the purpose of my visit to the United States. Immigration officials asked for proof that I was nominated for an Academy Award for the documentary *5 Broken Cameras* and they told me that if I couldn't prove the reason for my visit, my wife Soraya, my son Gibreel and I would be sent back to Turkey on the same day."

"After 40 minutes of questions and answers, Gibreel asked me why we were still waiting in that small room. I simply told him the truth: 'Maybe we'll have to go back.' I could see his heart sink."

Burnat continued, "Although this was an unpleasant experience, this is a daily occurrence for Palestinians, every single day, throughout the West Bank. There are more than 500 Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks, and other barriers to movement across our land, and not a single one of us has been spared the experience that my family and I experienced yesterday. Ours was a very minor example of what my people face every day."

American immigration officials have declined to comment. Significantly, Burnat is the first Palestinian to be nominated for an Oscar in the Best Documentary category. He told TMZ, the entertainment news organization, that he and his family were put in an

isolated room where they were questioned. Burnat tried to show officials the official email from the Academy and his hotel reservation, but they were not convinced. When Burnat tried to call and text his friends for help he was told not to use his cell.

Fortunately, documentary filmmaker Michael Moore received and answered his plea for assistance. On Twitter Moore reported, "Although he [Burnat] produced the Oscar invite nominees receive, that wasn't good enough & he was threatened with being sent back to Palestine. ... Apparently the Immigration & Customs officers couldn't understand how a Palestinian could be an Oscar nominee. Emad texted me for help ... I called Academy officials who called lawyers. I told Emad to give the officers my phone # and to say my name a couple of times."

Burnat's film, *5 Broken Cameras*, is a Palestinian-Israeli-French production, co-directed by Israeli Guy Davidi. The documentary tells the story of Bil'in, a Palestinian village surrounded by Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The film's title refers to the five cameras broken in the course of documenting five years of the village's systematic devastation by Zionist violence. In fact, the first camera was damaged by an Israeli army tear gas canister.

Had Burnat been an Israeli citizen, and not a Palestinian travelling to the United States to accept an award, his treatment by immigration officials would undoubtedly have been different.



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