London Palestine Film Festival opens with *Who Is Still Alive*

Jean Shaoul
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The London Palestine Film Festival, founded in 1998 by London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), has become a city-wide cultural event. The two-week festival lineup in November features more than 40 individual feature and short films, with more than 27 screenings and events, in arts centres and independent cinemas across London.

With the festival specialising in independent, experimental, and short films, few of them are likely to secure mainstream UK or international cinema distribution, although a few do get limited arthouse cinema runs. Others eventually appear on streaming platforms or regional festival circuits. One major exception is the film Edward Said: Between Worlds that uses family archives to show Said's life between Jerusalem and New York, which will be released in the UK and USA next year.

Gaza was again the central focus of this year's festival, even as coverage in the media has faded, featuring *Who Is Still Alive*, the frontline medical documentary *Life Support*, *From Ground Zero*, *Chronicles from the Siege* and several short films, *Gaza's Twins*, *Come Back to Me*, *Madleens*, documenting a grassroots civilian flotilla that set sail across the Mediterranean to challenge the blockade of Gaza.

Most of the screenings and events, many held in large venues, sold out rapidly, testifying to the enormous popular opposition to Israel's ongoing war of annihilation of the Palestinians.

One of the major events was A Life in Cinema: A Tribute to Mohammad Bakri, who died in December 2025 (to be reviewed later) featuring films he directed—such as J*enin, Jenin* and *Since You Left*—alongside Screen Talks with his sons, the actors Saleh and Ziad Bakri.

The lineup of films was predominantly, but not exclusively, intimate, first-hand human testimonies rather than traditional news reporting, exemplified by the opening film *Who Is Still Alive*, directed by Nicolas Wadimoff, Switzerland, 2025. It had two sold-out screenings and Q&A events at the Barbican Arts Centre, the largest performing arts centre in Europe.

The documentary, which premiered at the 2025 Venice International Film Festival (Giornate degli Autori), won the Cinema & Arts Award in Venice and the Prix de Soleure at the 2026 Solothurn Film Festival. In August 2026, the Swiss Federal Office of Culture selected it as Switzerland's official submission for Best International Feature Film at the 99th Academy Awards.

The documentary features nine survivors of the assault on Gaza, including an artist, musician, writer, journalist, film maker and school student, who share memories of the lives they left behind, their escapes, and their personal losses. Some of the handful of Palestinians that were able to escape via the Rafah crossing to Egypt before May 2024, they tell their stories amid a map of Gaza drawn in white paint on a black floor, showing its cities, camps, and neighbourhoods. The only visual elements are the participants' own videos taken on their phones.

They present their often warm memories and their feelings about Gaza—a city that had since 2007 been subject to a brutal Israeli blockade, aided and abetted by Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and the imperialist powers, and denied most of modern life's essentials. In 2010, the then UK Prime Minister David Cameron described it in the House of Commons as a "giant open prison". Home to 2.3 million Palestinians, it has been all but obliterated by the ongoing Israeli bombardment.

The participants in the documentary come from the more privileged social layers within Gaza. Few others were able to get out. For this reason their suffering highlights the unimaginable brutality of the situation facing those still trapped there.

The oldest, Jawdat Khoudary, is a construction entrepreneur and art collector, whose private museum that held decades of Palestinian archaeological heritage was destroyed. He saw the bulldozing of his life's work and museum. He describes leaving a home he never imagined abandoning and wanting audiences to see the beauty of his city rather than only images of devastation.

Adel Al Taweel, born in the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp, is a

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visual artist already in Egypt when the war broke out, whose father urged him to stay away so someone could carry on the family name. Al Taweel secretly returned to Gaza to be with them, only to be hit by a direct airstrike that killed 12 of his family members and destroyed his studio and artworks. Traumatised by the experience, he remembers little of the war, only piecing together what happened to him and his family from what others had told him. It was Adel who drew the large white map of Gaza on the black studio floor.

Eman Shannan is a humanitarian leader who founded the Aid and Hope Program for Cancer Patients Care, Gaza's first patient-led cancer charity. She recounts her pre-war routine and how she prepared for the worst, prioritising saving her patients' medical records and a laptop documenting her life's work when forced to flee amid the bombardment of her neighbourhood.

Mahmoud Jouda, a writer and poet who carried his books out of Gaza as an archive of its "golden days," describes documenting Gaza's parks and historical sites so his young daughter, Baghdad, will remember their homeland. He describes how he was slapped in the face by a soldier when he was eight years old for throwing a stone at a military jeep—an event he says shaped his worldview.

Haneen Harara, a journalist and television presenter, shares the reality of reporting while waiting for death, recounting how Israeli soldiers occupied and later burned down her family's home, and the devastating grief of losing her young niece in an attack.

Hana Eleiwa is a documentary filmmaker from Gaza, who had initially expected the bombardment to last only a few days. She speaks about the shock of displacement. She paid $25,000 to leave Gaza, leaving her mother behind and living in constant anxiety over what is happening back home.

Malak Khadra, a young filmmaker who used her social media presence to showcase Gaza's everyday beauty and culture, reflects on building a seaside studio with her sister that was reduced to rubble.

Feras Elshrafi is a young musician who attended the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music before it was destroyed. He lost most of his childhood friends during the offensive. He fled after his home was destroyed, carrying only his qanun. In a moving scene, he plays a melody on the instrument and stops at the exact note where an explosion interrupted his playing in Gaza.

Ghada Al Masri is a 14-year-old who wants to become a medical researcher. She contrasts the freedom of riding her bicycle through Gaza and her family's sprawling garden of olive trees and fishponds with the alienation of exile, unable in her new school to sing a national anthem that isn't hers as she longs for the homeland she cannot return to.

In the screen talk that followed the second screening of the film, the director Nicolas Wadimoff explained how because of the refusal of the Swiss authorities to grant visas to the Palestinian participants, he had been forced to shift production of the film to South Africa, the only country that allows Palestinians visa-free entry. He said he wanted to make a film that would make people feel what had happened to the Palestinians in Gaza. So, in contrast to the film *NAZA* that used the voice of the perpetrators, he used the voice of the victims to show what had happened and how it had affected them.

Jawdat Khoudary explained that he wanted "to show the heritage and beauty of our city" and that "the Palestinians are human, not animals, as the Israeli general had said, and there was no excuse for the world to ignore us".

The chair told him not to lose hope, that young people were on the move in Europe and the US, and turned to the audience for questions.

This writer pointed out that just days earlier, dock and port workers had gone on strike, picketing and demonstrating at 113 ports across 22 countries and five continents under the banner "Dockers do not work for war", in protest against the war in Gaza, the occupation of Palestine, the US-Israeli war against Iran, the conflict in Ukraine, and the use of ports as military staging grounds. The international working class was the social force that could end the suffering of the Palestinians, which required the building of a mass socialist anti-war movement. This met with applause.

A member of the audience, whose family had been forced to flee Israel/Palestine in 1948 and made their home in the Palestinian camp in Yarmouk, Damascus, rejected the film's nostalgia and general despair. She pointed out that there was enormous support worldwide for the Palestinians in Gaza, including within Israel. There are also Israelis, albeit still small in number, who oppose the genocide, have protested it and been repressed for doing so.

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