The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Sarajevo Film Festival Calls on Russia to Release Ukrainian Filmmaker

August 23, 2015



Oleg Sentsov

Organizers of the Sarajevo film festival, the Balkans' largest industry gathering, called on Russia on Saturday to release an Ukrainian film director who has been tried under terrorism charges and could be jailed for 23 years.

Oleg Sentsov was arrested last year while protesting against Russia's annexation of Crimea and charged with terrorism, organization of a terrorist group and arms trafficking.

The trial which begun in late July is expected to close soon. Prosecutors have asked for a 23-year jail term for him.

The Sarajevo festival joined a campaign by the European Film Academy whose members, such as Stephen Daldry, Mike Leigh and Wim Wenders, called for Sentsov's immediate release in a letter to the Russian authorities earlier this week.

“Free Oleg Sentsov,” British film producer Mike Downey, a member of the competition program jury for feature film, shouted from the festival’s main stage during a closing ceremony on Saturday evening.

He was joined by three Greek actors, part of a six-actor group playing in the film “Chevalier” by director Athina Rachel Tsangari, which won the best actor award at the largest film competition in the region stretching from Turkey to Austria.

The Sarajevo film festival, which was founded as an act of defiance while the city was besieged during the 1992-95 Bosnian war, this year showed 259 movies from 57 countries to over 100,000 visitors.

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