New York, May 14, 2020 — The Human Rights Watch Film Festival presents its first full digital edition of bold new films that will be available nationwide, in response to this time of crisis, Human Rights Watch said today. The film festival will feature in-depth online discussions with filmmakers, film subjects, and Human Rights Watch researchers.

As individuals and communities across the world struggle to face the challenges of an unprecedented global pandemic, the restriction of basic human rights – including pathways to medical and economic survival – are felt most severely by those already impacted by stark inequalities. Now more than ever, the world needs powerful and uplifting stories about those demanding justice, equality and safety for themselves, their communities and future generations.

John Biaggi, Director of the Human Rights Watch Film Festival says “At a time when the world is experiencing a profound shared adversity, it is particularly heartening to witness the brave individuals and strong communities in the 11 films in this year’s program. They overcome adversity in so many remarkable and moving ways to show us all how struggle can create positive and powerful change for humanity.”

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival continues to collaborate closely with its long-time cinema venue partners Film at Lincoln Center and IFC Center for the online 2020 edition of the festival. The festival plans to return to Film at Lincoln Center and IFC Center in 2021 and beyond.

The full lineup of the U.S. Digital Festival Premieres of the 2020 Human Rights Watch Film Festival are as follows:

The 8th, Aideen Kane, Lucy Kennedy, Maeve O’Boyle, USA/Ireland
Belly of the Beast (Opening Night), Erika Cohn, USA
Coded Bias, Shalini Kantayya, USA/UK/China/South Africa
Down a Dark Stairwell, Ursula Liang, USA
From Here, Christina Antonakos-Wallace, USA
Gather (Closing Night), Sanjay Rawal, USA
I Am Samuel, Peter Murimi, Kenya/Canada/UK/USA
Maxima, Claudia Sparrow, USA
Radio Silence, Juliana Fanjul, Switzerland/Mexico
Reunited, Mira Jargil, Denmark/Sweden
Welcome to Chechnya, David France, USA

Tickets will be available for sale beginning May 14. Audience members will be able to reserve and purchase individual film screening tickets by title, or a festival pass that will provide access to watch all 11 films. Access to screenings will be available to all individual ticket and festival pass holders during the film festival dates of June 11 through June 20, 2020.

To purchase tickets and to access program updates, please visit https://www.hrwfilmfestivalstream.org.

Each film has a limited number of tickets available, as would be the case for in-person cinema events, and advance ticket purchase is suggested. Ticket prices are: $9 individual ticket (public), $8 individual ticket for members of Film at Lincoln Center, Human Rights Watch Film Festival and IFC Center members, or $70 for a festival pass.

Audiences also have the opportunity to join live online Q&A’s for free for every title with the filmmakers, Human Rights Watch experts and special guests. For details please visit https://www.hrwfilmfestivalstream.org.

Members of the media may request advanced press screeners by contacting: Julia Pacetti / Cordelia Sklansky, Verdant Communications, julia@jmpverdant.com & cordelia@jmpverdant.com.

Download film stills here: HRWFF Media Downloads

Dennis Lim, Director of Programming for Film at Lincoln Center and the New York Film Festival states, “Film at Lincoln Center is proud to continue its long partnership with the Human Rights Watch Film Festival. This annual showcase has always reminded us of the power of cinema to make a difference, which makes this digital edition all the more essential in these challenging times.”

John Vanco, Senior Vice President and General Manager of IFC Center, adds, “IFC Center is honored to continue working with the Human Rights Watch Film Festival as the festival adapts to our new reality. Their mission of providing a showcase for important and inspiring films remains as vital as ever.”

The 11 films in this year’s festival are truly global in scope, and present an overriding message of hope, from reform of the criminal justice system in the U.S. to the fight for reproductive rights in Ireland and the reframing of long-suppressed yet ever-powerful indigenous voices in Peru and North America. The Festival is excited to share films that reflect a resounding global rallying cry: The will of the people shall not be ignored. Echoing Human Rights Watch’s own guiding principle of Investigate, Expose and Change, the 2020 program reflects these steps in ensuring human rights for all.
In the opening night film *Belly of the Beast*, brave and tenacious women inside the California penal system work tirelessly with women on the outside to uncover systematic forced sterilization of countless prisoners. Mexican journalists in *Radio Silence* encounter threats and very real acts of violence, overcoming fear to ensure their audiences receive vital information and access to the truth, despite government attempts to muzzle them. In *Down a Dark Stairwell*, filmmaker Ursula Liang peels back layers of accountability in the police system through a single criminal case, and its destructive impact on the Chinese-American and African-American communities. *Coded Bias* highlights how one woman’s in-depth investigation uncovers the racial and gender biases built into artificial intelligence (AI) technology and its far-reaching ramifications.

Four films reveal wider social realities through the lens of individual experience. In the stunning HBO documentary *Welcome to Chechnya*, brave Russian activists risk their lives to protect and relocate at-risk members of the closeted LGBT Chechyan community to safety outside Russia. The beautifully understated film *I Am Samuel* shares journeys of personal and political pressures, persecution and pride within a tight-knit group of gay men in Kenya. Sensitive and nuanced, *From Here* captures four stories of individuals defining what it means to “belong” in societies that are increasingly hostile to their existence. *Reunited* tells a story of love across borders, and the compromises a family must make when it is torn apart by circumstances beyond its control.

Strong women are the trailblazing force of the global human rights movement. *The 8th* accompanies the leaders of Ireland’s decades-long movement as they organize and raise their voices to end one of the world’s most restrictive abortion laws. In *Maxima*, we meet the remarkable Máxima Acuña, who stares down one of the world’s largest mining corporations while defending her farm in Peru. Our Closing Night film *Gather* celebrates the fruits of the indigenous food sovereignty movement, profiling innovative changemakers in Native American tribes across North America who are reconnecting with their past and their environment as a form of resistance and survival.

**About the Films**

*The 8th*
Aideen Kane, Lucy Kennedy, Maeve O'Boyle, USA/Ireland, 2020, documentary, 94 minutes, English
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Friday, June 19, 7pm (EDT)
Capturing a crucial moment for women’s rights, *The 8th* tells the incredible story of how the Republic of Ireland overturned one of the world’s most restrictive laws on abortion. Led by the fiercely passionate Ailbhe Smyth, Ireland’s pro-choice movement must radically shift tactics to carry a traditionally conservative electorate over the line. Their efforts are particularly complex in
the context of Ireland’s strong religious roots and historical mistreatment of women and children. Essential viewing in an era of global rollbacks on women’s bodily autonomy rights, this extraordinary film delivers a lesson in the power of grassroots activism and amplifies the voices of women across ages and backgrounds who refuse to stand down.

“It's actually about more than what you're voting on – while we're voting on reproductive health care, it's also about the value we're giving women in Irish society, saying we do value them and we do trust them.” — Andrea Horan, *The 8th*

*Belly of the Beast* — Opening Night
Erika Cohn, USA, 2020, documentary, 82 minutes, English
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Thursday, June 11, 8pm (EDT)
When a courageous young woman and a radical lawyer discover a pattern of illegal involuntary sterilizations in California’s women’s prison system, they take to the courtroom to wage a near-impossible battle against the Department of Corrections. With a growing team of investigators inside prison working with colleagues on the outside, they uncover a series of statewide crimes – from dangerously inadequate health care to sexual assault to coercive sterilizations – primarily targeting women of color. But no one believes them. This shocking legal battle captured over seven years features extraordinary access and intimate accounts from currently and formerly incarcerated women, demanding our attention for a shameful and ongoing legacy of eugenics and reproductive injustice in the United States.

“I have the power to change lives with the awareness of what happened to me.” — Kelli Dillon, *Belly of the Beast*

*Coded Bias*
Shalini Kantayya, USA/UK/China/South Africa, 2020, documentary, 85 minutes, English
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Friday, June 12, 8pm (EDT)
When MIT Media Lab researcher Joy Buolamwini discovers that most facial-recognition software misidentifies women and darker-skinned faces, as a woman of color working in a field dominated by white males, she is compelled to investigate further. What she discovers drives her to push the US government to create legislation to counter the far-reaching dangers of bias in a technology that is steadily encroaching on our lives. Centering the voices of women leading the charge to ensure our civil rights are protected, *Coded Bias* asks two key questions: What is the impact of artificial intelligence’s increasing role in governing our liberties? And what are the consequences for people stuck in the crosshairs due to their race, color and gender?

“Because of the power of these tools, left unregulated there is no recourse for abuse ... we need laws.” — Joy Buolamwini, *Coded Bias*

Official Selection, Sundance Film Festival, 2020
**Down A Dark Stairwell**
Ursula Liang, USA, 2020, documentary, 83 minutes, English, Cantonese and Mandarin with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Wednesday, June 17, 8pm (EDT)
When a Chinese-American police officer kills an innocent, unarmed black man in an unlit stairwell of a New York City housing project on November 20, 2014, communities across the city erupt with demands for legal accountability. When he becomes the first New York Police Department officer convicted of an on-duty shooting in over a decade, the fight for justice becomes much more complicated. One of the largest Asian-American protests in history challenges an uneven legal system, while the African-American community is forced to defend its rights again after a series of police killings. Cries for justice amid systemic inequities find disparate notions of fairness called into question.

“*Down a Dark Stairwell* tells a crucial American story of how divisions among racial minorities ultimately serve white supremacy.” — John Raphling, Senior Researcher, US Criminal Justice, Human Rights Watch

**From Here**
Christina Antonakos-Wallace, USA, 2020, documentary, 89 minutes, English, German, Spanish, Punjabi, Romani, Vietnamese with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Sunday, June 14, 8pm (EDT)
*From Here* is a hopeful story of Tania, Sonny, Miman, and Akim – artists and activists based in Berlin and New York whose lives and futures hang in the balance of immigration and integration debates. As the US and Germany grapple with racism, nationalism and a fight against diversity, our protagonists move from their 20s into their 30s and face major turning points in their lives: fighting for citizenship; starting families; and finding room for creative expression. Spanning a decade in two of the world’s largest centers of immigration, this sensitive and nuanced documentary captures their struggle to define what it means to “belong” in societies that are increasingly hostile to their existence.

“In the face of nationalism, we need narratives that connect us to our interdependence, challenge our assumptions and open our imagination. The stories in *From Here* invite viewers to engage with – rather than retreat from – our global reality.” — Christina Antonakos-Wallace, director, *From Here*

**Gather** — Closing Night
Sanjay Rawall, USA, 2020, documentary, 74 minutes, English
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Saturday, June 20, 8pm (EDT)
*Gather* celebrates the fruits of the indigenous food sovereignty movement, profiling innovative changemakers in Native American tribes across North America reclaiming their identities after centuries of physical and cultural genocide. On the Apache reservation, a chef embarks on a ambitious project to reclaim his tribe’s ancient ingredients; in South Dakota, a gifted Lakota high school student, raised on a buffalo ranch, is using science to prove her tribe’s native wisdom
about environmental sustainability; and in Northern California, a group of young men from the Yurok tribe is struggling to rehabilitate its rivers to protect the salmon. Gather beautifully shows how the reclaiming and recovery of ancient foodways provides a form of resistance and survival, collectively bringing back health and self-determination to their people.

“Fighting for water rights and fighting for hunting rights, and maintaining our food ways is our own battle to fight for our human rights.” — Nephi Craig, Gather

I Am Samuel
Peter Murimi, Kenya/Canada/UK/USA, 2020, documentary, 69 minutes, Swahili, English, Luhya with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Sunday, June 14, 3:30pm (EDT)
Samuel grew up on a farm in the Kenyan countryside, where tradition is valued above all else. He moves to Nairobi in search of a new life, where he finds belonging in a community of fellow queer men where he meets and falls in love with Alex. Their love thrives even though Kenyan laws criminalize anyone who identifies as LGBTQ, and together they face threats of violence and rejection. Samuel’s father, a preacher at the local church, doesn’t understand why his son is not yet married, and Samuel must navigate the very real risk that being truthful to who he is may cost him his family’s acceptance. Filmed over five years, I Am Samuel is an intimate portrait of a Kenyan man balancing pressures of family loyalty, love and safety while questioning the concept of conflicting identities.

“This is a lovely film, very honest, very raw, with characters who are compelling in how real they are.” — Neela Ghoshal, Senior Researcher, LGBT Rights, Human Rights Watch

“I can’t really be myself. It’s like they’re seeing just half of who I am.” — Alex, I Am Samuel

Maxima
Claudia Sparrow, USA/Peru, 2019, documentary, 88 minutes, English, Spanish with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Tuesday, June 16, 8pm (EDT)
Maxima tells the incredible story of 2016 environmental Goldman Prize winner Máxima Acuña and her family, who own a small, remote plot in the Peruvian Highlands. The Acuñas rely solely on the environment for their livelihood, but their land sits directly in the path of a multi-billion-dollar project run by one of the world’s largest gold-mining corporations. Faced with intimidation, violence and criminal prosecution, we follow Máxima’s tireless fight for justice, taking her from the Peruvian Supreme Court to the doors of the World Bank in Washington, D.C. Standing ever mighty, Máxima sings of her love of the land in the face of widespread oppression of indigenous people and relentless attempts to destroy environmental resources that the world relies on.

“Our dignity has no price.” — Máxima Acuña, Maxima
Winner Audience Award for a Feature Film, Hot Docs 2019

**Radio Silence**
Juliana Fanjul, Switzerland/Mexico, 2019, documentary, 79 minutes, Spanish with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Saturday, June 14, 4pm (EDT)
To millions of people in Mexico, the incorruptible journalist and news anchor Carmen Aristegui is regarded as the trusted alternative voice to official government spin, fighting daily against deliberate disinformation spread through news sources, government corruption, and the related drugs trade. When she is fired by a radio station in 2015 after uncovering a scandal involving then-President Enrique Peña Nieto, Carmen – with her dedicated journalist colleagues – decides to build a separate news platform. Facing threats of violence in the wake of a prominent journalist’s vicious murder, they must overcome fear for their personal well-being to continue in a shared fight for democracy and justice.

“Fear must not defeat us. We must not leave room for silence and allow this situation to terrorize journalists.” — Carmen Aristegui, *Radio Silence*

**Reunited**
Mira Jargil, Denmark/Sweden, 2020, documentary, 78 minutes, English, Danish, Arabic with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Saturday, June 20, 3:30pm (EDT)
This is a story of love across borders, and the compromises a family must make when it is torn apart by circumstances beyond its control. When Rana and Muhkles are forced to flee the war in Syria in a desperate search for stable and secure futures for their family, they are separated from their children. Rana is in Denmark, Mukhles is in Canada and their young sons Jad and Nidal, ages 11 and 17, are stuck alone in Turkey. Through small everyday moments captured on video calls and home movies, director Mia Jargil paints an intimate and loving portrait of a family in limbo, navigating frustrating twists and turns at the hands of Kafkaesque bureaucracies, combatting physical distance to retain familial bonds and connection.

“Reunited … shed(s) light on a family's destiny in order to provide the debate with a human perspective and mobilize a common guard against intolerance.” — Mia Jargil, *Reunited*

**Welcome to Chechnya**
David France, USA, 2020, documentary, 107 minutes, English, Russian with English subtitles
Live online Q&A with filmmaker and guests on Saturday, June 13, 8pm (EDT)
This searing documentary, directed by acclaimed writer and Oscar®-nominated director David France (*How to Survive a Plague, The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*), shadows a group of brave activists risking their lives to confront the ongoing anti-LGBTQ campaign in the Russian republic of Chechnya. Employing a guerilla filmmaking style, France takes us inside the fraught, day-to-day workings of an underground pipeline of activists facing incredible risks to rescue victims from this brutal government-directed campaign. Through unfettered access, and with a
commitment to protecting anonymity, this documentary exposes these underreported atrocities, while highlighting an extraordinary group of people.

“Welcome to Chechnya stands as a stark reminder of what human beings are capable of doing and why we need human rights protections. It is also a tribute to the courage of strangers.”
— Graeme Reid, Director, LGBT Rights Program, Human Rights Watch

Courtesy of HBO Documentary Films

Winner, U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Editing, Sundance Film Festival, 2020

Winner, Teddy Activist Award and the Panorama Publikumspreis (Audience Award) for Best Documentary and the Special Jury Amnesty International Film Award at Berlinale, 2020

Right to Know Award at One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, 2020