The courage of Syria Civil Defence volunteers, also known as the White Helmets, will be in the spotlight at the 2017 Oscars this Sunday, as well as at the premier human rights film festival in Geneva next month. The White Helmets documentary directed by Orlando Von Einsiedel has received a nomination for this year’s Oscar in the Best Short Documentary category. The Netflix movie follows volunteers from the 2016 Right Livelihood Award Laureate Syria Civil Defence in the chaos of war-torn Syria, as they risk their lives to rescue survivors from underneath the rubble.

Since the travel ban imposed by US President Trump on seven Muslim-majority countries in January has been stalled, the protagonists are hoping to attend the star-studded awards ceremony in Los Angeles on 26 February.

Raed Al Saleh, Executive Director of Syria Civil Defence, will attend the 15th International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights taking place in Geneva from 10-19 March where another film about the White Helmets, Last Men in Aleppo, will be screened as the closing film of this year’s festival. Directed by Feras Fayyad and Steen Johannessen, this visceral documentary won the Grand Prix at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.
Raed Al Saleh said: “The White Helmets are humbled that through the work of documentary film makers, their story has reached and touched so many. The films show the reality of daily life in Syria and serve as a reminder of the ongoing horror faced by millions of ordinary Syrian civilians.”

The Right Livelihood Award jury recognised the White Helmets “…for their outstanding bravery, compassion and humanitarian engagement in rescuing civilians from the destruction of the Syrian civil war.” They became the first Syrian Laureate in the award's 37-year history.

About the Right Livelihood Award
The Right Livelihood Award was established in 1980 to “honour and support courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems”. It has become widely known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' and there are now 166 Laureates from 68 countries. In addition to presenting the annual award in Stockholm, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation supports its Laureates, particularly those who may be in danger due to the nature of their work.

About Syria Civil Defence (The White Helmets)
Popularly known as the White Helmets, Syria Civil Defence is a group of 3,000 volunteers, men and women, from local communities who have since 2013 risked their lives to save over 60,000 people — regardless of religious or political affiliation — from underneath the rubble of buildings destroyed during the Syrian civil war. Bakers, tailors, salespersons, teachers – they are now trained fire-fighters, search and rescue workers, and medics.

A lifeline and a rare source of hope for the besieged civilian population, Syria Civil Defence also support the reconstruction of damaged public infrastructure and educate children and adults on preventative safety measures to take during an aerial attack. Their deep commitment to humanitarian action has drawn international attention to the plight of civilians who have become victims of indiscriminate bombing in Syria, and they have been outspoken in calling for an end to the hostilities in the country.

http://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/laureates/syria-civil-defence/

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