

# TODAY THEY TOOK MY SON



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## A SHORT FILM

Directed by Pierre Dawalibi  
Written and Produced by Farah Nabulsi

Length: 7 minutes 45 seconds  
Languages: English (& some Arabic w/English Subtitles)  
Format: 2K DCP, 5.1 Digital  
Country of Production: UAE & Lebanon



## SYNOPSIS

A mother coping with her young son being taken away by a military system. Her helplessness to prevent the cruel and inhumane treatment she knows he is experiencing is more than any mother can bear. Will he be returned and why was he taken in the first place? Based on the true experiences of more than 700 Palestinian children each year.



A young boy with dark hair and a slight smile is looking directly at the camera. He is holding a lit red candle in front of him, which is the primary light source in the scene. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blurred lights visible on the left side. The overall mood is intimate and warm.

# TRAILER

To watch the trailer visit [todaytheytookmyson.com](http://todaytheytookmyson.com)

# FARAH NABULSI

Producer/Writer

Farah is the daughter of Palestinians living in diaspora that was born, raised and educated in London, England.

She began her career as a banker with JP Morgan, but went on to build a children-focused business that she ran for 10 years.

As a Palestinian in diaspora, she always thought she understood the injustices suffered by her people, but seeing it first-hand changed her in a deep and overwhelming way. Witnessing the treatment of children was particularly harrowing, and as a mother of 3 boys, she kept thinking “what if that was my child?”

This led her to start a media production company that could help others see and feel what the Palestinians experience.

Today They Took My Son is the first of 2 films that she has written and produced.



# PIERRE DAWALIBI

Director

Born and raised on the Lebanese coast, Pierre survived 30 years of war and occupation, which nurtured the social activist in him.

After studying Theater Arts and Film Directing in Lebanon, he moved to Dubai where he gained invaluable experience in the production of big budget commercials.

Pierre’s breakthrough as a director was in 2006 with “It’s About Time”, a short documentary that was an internet hit with over 1.5 million views and screened at 12 international film festivals.

His directing experience covers fiction, reality, TV commercials, corporate videos, TV shows and documentaries. Several of his projects and scripts have won or gotten nominations in film festivals around the world.



# QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY FARAH

## Why was the film made?

I made the film because the story had to be told. And whilst we're homing in on the experience of one child and his mother, the truth of the matter is that the same story has played out (and continues to play out) for thousands of children and their mothers. I guess you could say it is ethics and decency that compelled me to make it. There is a universal feeling of motherhood and the love any parent has for their child is universal. So if the story could be told in a way that anyone with a child that they love in their life could relate to, then it would hopefully open people's hearts to understand the pain any mother would go through and any child would go through if they were in the situation regardless of ethnicity or circumstance.

## Where was the film made?

Whilst we would have loved to film somewhere in Palestine, there's no way Pierre could be allowed to enter as he's Lebanese. So we turned to Lebanon instead. Being on the northern border of Israel/Palestine and home to about 12 Palestinian refugee camps, it was as close as we could get both physically and in terms of the look & feel. There's a really creative, energetic and professional pool of talent there, so it worked out well. Pre- and post-production was done in Dubai.



## What has the reaction been so far?

As a short film, it had to have the type of punch that would leave people changed in some way. And in the private screenings given so far, that's the reaction I'm seeing. People leave crying, angry, more informed, distraught or all of the above! They've left wanting to learn more and these are the exact reasons why I wanted to make the film – to leave people more enlightened, even if it is paradoxically in a dark or depressing way. Another great reaction is how everyone really loves Khalid (the "son" played by Elias Naoum). They fall in love with him straight away and that was really important because people needed to feel for him and his mother from the get-go, given the short length of the film.

## What was the trickiest part of making this film?

No doubt it was sticking to our very tight budget without cutting corners that would affect the quality or substance of the film. One of the ways we did that was to use natural light only to avoid paying for lighting. That's why Pierre approached Joe Saad to be DOP. He was a magician. He has this amazing talent to use natural light in the most fantastic way, but even magicians can't control the sun. You wouldn't know it, but some final shots of close ups were filmed on some random building roof-top! We were literally chasing the sun.



### Why should people watch this film?

The film combines “gloss” with substance. It is drawn from raw, organic writing, based on painful truth. It is based on 1000’s of true - yet untold - stories, which makes it very authentic. It is a film written and made with passion that touches people at a deep emotional level. And, as emotional creatures, there’s nothing more beautiful than being touched in that way. It also covers the topic of children’s human rights, which frankly everyone should sit up and take note of!

### Given the setting, why is the narrative in English?

Considering the film’s purpose and that the target audience is English speakers, I felt that any other language would take away from the film. People take on the mother’s emotion through her voice and that would have been lost if they were forced to read subtitles whilst hearing a foreign language. And, let’s not forget, truth be told, I read and write Arabic like a 5 year old!

### Where did you get the inspiration from?

It started off with a visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I was affected by the circumstances that children were being raised in which is, essentially, a brutal military system of an occupying foreign power. But it was a United Nations report on the systematic arrest and imprisonment of children in the occupied territories that outraged me into doing something. Being the mother of 3 young boys, I tried to imagine any of them being taken away by a military system that disregarded their human rights. Knowing that there was nothing I could do to stop it would be devastating. If that happened to me, I would be completely destroyed. I literally wrote the first draft of the script bawling my eyes out!

### If you had to do it again, what would you do differently?

Based on the reactions it’s received, I don’t think I’d do anything differently. Unless, of course, I had the access and budget for a seasoned actress to do the mother’s voiceover instead of me. Someone like Angelina Jolie would have been amazing because, as a mother and special envoy with the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees, she could do the role more justice and help draw attention to the topic of the film.

### What are your plans for the film?

I just want the film to be seen by as many people as possible. And the key to that is getting it into good, credible film festivals followed by some type of online distribution. If the film can be shown and shared widely, and people can appreciate the cinematography, the music and the underlying story and its basis on truth, then that would be awesome.



# DIRECTORS COMMENTS

Today They Took My Son is the type of film I would love to direct for the rest of my life. As soon as I read the original script, I cried. While writing my treatment and visual script I cried like a baby, like a father, like a human being, pitying our human behavior. Needless to speak about what I felt in the post-production rooms.

Since then, I took it as a responsibility to use any assets that I possess in order to deliver this important message. My biggest hope for this film is not festival selections and awards as much as it is for it to reach as many hearts as possible to really understand what is happening out there. It might help us drop those masks of prejudice and wear compassion and righteousness regardless of race or ethnicity.

The use of true images in the film was for me mandatory to merge fiction with reality, to take the viewer from the fictive set to the actual event, history and emotions. These images are so powerful if we just stop there and re-imagine those moments. And that was my intention: to revive those moments with actors, while staying faithful to the strength of image itself.

I must say, we were very lucky with the production team in Lebanon. They were highly professional, responsive, prompt, organized. We had to do all the filming in two days, which was quite insane. And thanks to the patience and dedication of every crew member, we were able to pull it off, with minimal time wasted. All production elements were in place. Props, costumes, set design and construction, casting, camera work, food. Everything was done with accuracy and artistic approach that added value to every shot really.

Acting was a beautiful challenge for me. Working with first time young actors and such an intensity of emotions for so many long hours, was a tough task for me and definitely for them. However, they never complained, or hesitated to give me another take with their best of engagement, despite their exhaustion. The journey was so enjoyable that some of the actors cried when production finished. They wanted more. And that was my biggest reward.

I hope our industry will continue to grow and progress more responsibly in the future to tell stories that can change the world for the better.





*“As a Palestinian, I was imprisoned and tortured three times by the Israeli occupation when I was 14, and 15 years old. Not only did Today They Took My Son call back memories of my experiences, but it helped me understand for the first time the feelings of my mother each time they took me away. It also made me reflect on the heroic role that Palestinian women play in our struggle for freedom. The sounds of my mother’s crying and weeping makes a whole new sense to me today. Thank you for your empathy and courage to shed light on the human side of our struggle for freedom and dignity.”*

**— Ghaleb Darabya**

*“The visual and verbal poetry of Farah Nabulsi’s short film powerfully conveys the horrors suffered by generations of Palestinian children, and their families, under belligerent Israeli occupation. Palestinian children are seized by Israeli soldiers, confined to dark cells in isolation, interrogated and tortured, deprived of access to parents and lawyers, and sent to military courts where conviction rates are higher than 99%. As her film shows, these children are certain to emerge from their experiences traumatised and broken, their childhood in tatters. I urge anyone who seeks to understand the crushing realities of life for Palestinians under Israeli occupation to watch this film.”*

**— Jonathan Cook**

*“Today They Took My Son covers a very important topic and an area that Human Rights Watch has spent a great deal of time documenting, so it’s great to see the issue taken up in a way that people can relate to on a personal level. The imagery is great, in particular contrasting the real photographs of detained kids with the fictionalized narrative in the film, and the flashbacks between the documentary footage and the narrative recreated is also effective.”*

**— Sarah Leah Whitson**

*“Today They Took My Son is really well shot! The message is powerful, and true, and shows the extreme injustice Palestinians live through.”*

**— Sawsan Asfari**

*“I’m deeply touched and moved beyond words! The familiarity of recurrent pain only makes it all that more intolerable. Farah film made me sob with all other mothers, grandmothers, children, human beings who are overwhelmed by the casualness of such horrific injustice and persistence of such willful cruelty. Farah revelation of the simple Palestinian story is so personal, so human, so stark that its intensity becomes unbearable. The aesthetic of immersion left me breathless and silent.”*

**— Hanan Ashrawi**

*“There are not enough stones to throw, not enough words to express or tears enough to wash away the crimes committed by Israel. For seven decades Israel has been practicing the unforgivable, unrepentable crimes of genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid. But no crime is as terrible as Israel’s campaign of abduction and abuse of Palestinian children. Israel’s cruelty, a mother’s pain and despair and a child’s trauma are all faithfully and painfully illustrated in Farah Nabulsi’s film, “Today They Took My Son”*

**— Miko Peled**

*“American law bars aid to military forces that engage in systematic rights abuses. This heartbreaking film, and the brutal reality of which it is a tiny sample, tell us loud and clear that the law should be enforced and military aid to Israel should end as long as the criminal occupation is maintained.”*

**— Noam Chomsky**



# CREDITS

**Executive Producer**  
Farah Nabulsi

**Directed by**  
Pierre Dawalibi

**Written by**  
Farah Nabulsi & Hind Shoufani

**Produced by**  
Farah Nabulsi & Josef Kaluf

**Director of Photography**  
Joe Saad

**Edited by**  
Christina Zaccour

**Music Composed by**  
Adam Benobaid

**Narrated by/Mother Voice**  
Farah Nabulsi

**Main Cast**  
Khalid (Son) - Elias Naoum  
Mother (Miriam) - Mira Sidawi  
Leila (Sister) - Angie Saleh

A dimly lit room with a table, a lamp, and a window with patterned curtains. The room is dark, with the primary light source being a lamp on the table. The table is covered with a white tablecloth and has a basket of fruit on it. In the background, there is a table with a white tablecloth and several vases on it. A window with patterned curtains is visible on the left side of the image.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR  
PRESS PRIVATE SCREENER**

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