



Program Director Statement

This year's edition of the ACT Human Rights Film Festival brings together over a dozen feature-length documentaries from around the world in addition to several compelling short films that represent the best of international cinema.

Just as we have done ever since the 2016 inaugural festival, the members of ACT's programming committee have selected some of the most accomplished and inspiring examples of nonfiction filmmaking from the past year, including works that celebrate the heroic efforts of women to shine a light on institutional abuses and fight for their rights, whether on the streets of Dublin (where pro-choice activists made history three years ago by successfully campaigning against Ireland's nationwide ban on abortions) or in California's correctional facilities (where female prisoners and their advocates have blown the whistle on the practice of forced sterilizations). As the festival's Director of Programming, I am especially proud of the fact that a majority of the films in this year's lineup were directed or codirected by women. This, I believe, highlights an encouraging trend in human rights cinema, which has increasingly provided creative-expressive-investigative opportunities to people who, for no other reason besides their ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, have faced discrimination and other obstacles in more mainstream professional callings (in the "industry").

I am also excited that many of our selections — including those featuring split-screen effects, military drone-camera footage, black-and-white cinematography, and behind-the-scenes auditions that reflexively comment on the acting process — are genuinely groundbreaking *as films*; meaning that they push the boundaries of what cinema can "be" or "do" and furthermore give audiences the opportunity to reflect on their own preconceptions about the motion picture medium as both an art form and a means of learning more about our fellow humans. Empathy — the capacity to feel another person's emotions (including the experiences of elation or pain, joy or anguish) — is what this year's films deliver in buckets, and I anticipate that audiences will be moved to both laughter and tears over the ten-day span of our festival.

But these amazing films — many of them Colorado premieres — also remind us that everyday heroes walk among us. Be they Texans who distribute food and water for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and making their way into the heartland of this country, or the residents of Puerto Rico who, with dignity but in the absence of adequate global assistance, are putting their lives back together in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the subjects of this year's documentaries are as deserving of our admiration as any Nobel Peace Prize winner. Taking viewers from Japan to Sudan to the German colony of Villa Baviera in Chile, the nearly 20 films comprising this year's festival are "transporting" in more ways than one. I and the other members of the ACT team cannot wait to go on that journey with local and national audiences beginning March 19.

David Scott Diffrient
Director of Programming