

On 21st October, United Nations Cinema screened 'The Poetess' in the second of a series of events in partnership with The [British Museum](#) in London.



Organised in the context of the Ian Hislop exhibition '[I, Object](#)' and the New Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World, the film tells the story of Hissa Hilal, the first woman to reach the finals of the Arab world's biggest televised poetry competition, 'Million's Poet'. 'The Poetess' is her inspiring story: a woman risking her personal safety and seizing an opportunity, live on TV in front of 75 million viewers, to use her wit and lyricism to critique patriarchal society and religious extremism, and to urge a more peaceful Islam.



The screening was followed by a conversation with guest speakers, BAFTA nominated story teller and educator Alia Alzougbi and Director of [UN Women Brussels Office](#) Dagmar Schumacher, moderated by Deborah Seward ([UNRIC](#)

). A message to the audience, from co-director Andreas Wolff was also shown prior to the conversation, in which he talked about the making of the film.

Opening the discussion, Ms Seward declared that "*Showing this film at the British Museum is so meaningful because of the importance of culture. This is a vector through which Hissa Hilal expresses herself* ."

Ms Alzougbi emphasized the historic background of women and Islam: "*Once upon a time Mohammed relied on women's advice. He surrounded himself with women. To see ourselves going backward in this way is very interesting.*"



"Hissa's story brings me back to the Sustainable Development Goals: this idea of 'Leaving no-one behind', said Ms Schumacher, who went on to describe some of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5, achieving Gender Equality, adding that "*Hissa challenges gender stereotypes and tries to break up the power structures. She has really contributed to giving women a voice in spaces where it would otherwise have been silenced. She has participated in an event where women have never reached the final. This is really remarkable, and she is really a hero on this front.*"

Hissa Hilal believed in the power of her words and spoke up through the medium of poetry, saying that "*Women are the soul of society. When you isolate women, you isolate the soul of society*". About three years after the show, Hissa deleted her Facebook account. Together with her husband she decided to move away from the capital to an isolated area in the North of the country, where her roots are. She hasn't published anything ever since.

To watch the trailer, [click here](#) .

To see pictures from the evening, [click here](#) .

For more information about the film, [click here](#) .

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