



Good evening, everyone!

My name is Greer Stone. I'm the mayor of Palo Alto and it's a pleasure to welcome you all to the opening night of the 27th United Nations Association Film Festival (UNAFF). As we gather here this evening, we celebrate not only the art of documentary filmmaking but also the power of these films to inspire, educate, and ignite meaningful discussions on some of the most critical issues facing our world today.

Founded in 1998 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNAFF has, over the years, built a worldwide reputation for its integrity and courage. It has firmly placed Palo Alto on the global map of documentary cinema, and it's truly a testament to the vision and commitment of everyone involved in this remarkable event. But I do want to take a moment to acknowledge one especially remarkable individual, Jasmina Bojic, who founded UNAFF and continues to be its Executive Director. UNAFF is now one of the most successful and oldest international film festivals in the United States, and thanks to Jasmina's vision and commitment to bringing these transformative films to Palo Alto, we all get the pleasure in being able to see them here in our beautiful city, so thank you, Jasmina. Let's all give her a big round of applause.

And I mentioned the success of this film festival, well get this: Eight of the films showcased at UNAFF have gone on to win Oscars, and another 36 have been nominated for Academy Awards. So, if any of the filmmakers are looking for their next leading man, my mayoral term is up in January, just saying... But beyond the accolades, UNAFF has become our city's cultural heartbeat, fostering vibrant discussions that enrich our understanding of the world around us.

Palo Alto, as the heart of Silicon Valley, is renowned for its technological innovations. But for 27 years, UNAFF has provided an essential counterweight, adding a dimension of culture and humanity to our city's legacy. Through the lens of powerful documentaries, we have explored the world's most urgent issues, and in doing so, we've broadened our

collective perspective. These films remind us that while technology drives much of our global progress, it's empathy, understanding, and shared human stories that guide our moral compass.

It's impossible to engage with these stories without developing empathy for the struggles and triumphs of others. Their experiences push us to think globally while acting locally, reminding us of our responsibility to address issues like the environment and climate, equity and tolerance, sustainability, and healthcare. The solutions we create here in Palo Alto can have a ripple effect that extends far beyond our city limits.

By showcasing a cross-section of the world's problems, UNAFF brings a cosmopolitan dimension to Palo Alto and provides our citizens with a unique source of education and inspiration. It's a festival that sparks ideas, fosters friendships, and even contributes to our local businesses as it brings guests from across the Bay Area, the U.S., and beyond.

While the next 11 days will be the festival's centerpiece, the impact of UNAFF doesn't end here. Its year-round programs address the needs of vulnerable groups in our community, including seniors, veterans, students, women, and children. This commitment to local outreach shows how deeply UNAFF is woven into the fabric of Palo Alto.

As we navigate a world increasingly divided by misinformation, festivals like UNAFF provide a much-needed antidote. In this age of sophisticated technology and brazen distortions, documentary films stand as a beacon of truth, guiding us through the noise and helping us discern what really matters. Over the next several days, you'll have the opportunity to engage with 60 incredible documentaries and meet their creators—filmmakers who challenge us to think critically and act compassionately.

So, as you immerse yourself in these films, remember the words of one of the great social justice leaders of our time, Martin Luther King Jr.: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Thank you again to Jasmina, the UNAFF team, and all the visionary filmmakers who are sharing their stories and cultivating empathy so that we can help bend that arc together.

Thank you, and enjoy the festival!