

**A Channel 4 News & ITN
Productions Feature
Documentary for Channel 4 and
PBS FRONTLINE**

FOR SAMA
إلى سما

**Directed by Waad al-Kateab and
Edward Watts**

RT: 96 mins

www.ForSamaFilm.com

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SYNOPSIS

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

FOR SAMA is an intimate and epic journey into the female experience of war.

A love letter from a young mother to her daughter, the film tells the story of Waad al-Kateab's life through five years of the uprising in Aleppo, Syria as she falls in love, gets married and gives birth to Sama, all while cataclysmic conflict rises around her.

Her camera captures incredible stories of loss, laughter and survival as Waad wrestles with an impossible choice – whether or not to flee the city to protect her daughter's life, when leaving means abandoning the struggle for freedom for which she has already sacrificed so much.

The film is the first feature documentary by Emmy award-winning filmmakers, Waad al-Kateab and Edward Watts.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

FOR SAMA is an intimate feature documentary that takes the form of a letter from Waad al-Kateab, a 26-year-old Syrian mother, to her daughter Sama recorded in the last days of the battle for Aleppo, Syria.

Waad lives with Sama's father, a doctor in the last surviving hospital in rebel-held Aleppo. Surrounded on all sides, bombarded daily by the Syrian regime and Russian air force, Waad fears they may be killed at any moment. So she crafts a filmed message to her one-year old

daughter to explain who her parents were, what they were fighting for and why Sama came into this world – a record for the young girl in case they don't survive.

Waad's story begins in 2012 when she was a student studying marketing at Aleppo University. Protests against the brutal dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad reach the university and Waad is one of the first to join. Her camera captures the joy and optimism of those early days. She meets a young medic in the protests called Hamza and with a group of friends they continue to demand freedom even as the regime resorts to greater and greater violence to crush them, eventually engulfing the city in full-blown war. They lose friends and narrowly escape death themselves at the hand of snipers, airstrikes and barrel bombs, scenes all captured on camera. Then, in the midst of the storm, Hamza proposes marriage.

They marry, move into their first home and before long Waad is pregnant, scenes recognisable to any young couple anywhere in the world. The difference is their honeymoon plays out against an increasingly apocalyptic war. When the Russians intervene to save the regime in September 2015, they unleash ferocious violence against the rebels. Yet despite their fear, Waad and Hamza decide not to flee the city as so many have done, but to stay and continue the fight for freedom. She realises that the struggle is no longer only for them, it's for the future of her daughter. Sama is born on the 1st January 2016, a small ray of hope in the chaos.

Sama's first year of life will see the last year of the battle for the city, a time of almost unimaginable darkness. The regime and its allies resort to every imaginable atrocity to crush the rebels. Hamza's hospital is bombed. They are besieged and witness attacks by chlorine gas, cluster and barrel bombs, massacres of women and children. Yet amid it all, Waad and Hamza have the joy of parenthood, witnessing the first weeks of their baby daughter's life, full of fun and laughter. She gives them the strength to endure and inspiration to all of the last band of rebels.

Eventually, they are overwhelmed and forced into exile. In the exodus, the family pack their things and with tears in their eyes, bid farewell to the shattered city, the place where their dream of freedom was born and where it died. Yet they carry their daughter with them, an eternal symbol of the love and hope that the violence of tyrants cannot destroy.

FOR SAMA is a Channel 4 News / ITN Production for Channel 4 and Frontline PBS.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

**WAAD AL-
KATEAB**

This is not just a film for me –it’s my life. I started capturing my personal story without any plan, just filming the protests in Syria on my mobile phone, like so many other activists. I could never have imagined where my journey would take me through those years. The mix of emotions we experienced - happiness, loss, love – and the horrific crimes committed by the Assad regime against ordinary innocent people, was unimaginable... even as we lived through it.

From the beginning, I found myself drawn to capture stories of life and humanity, rather than focus on the death and destruction which filled the news. And as a woman in a conservative part of Aleppo, I was able to access the experiences of women and children in the city, traditionally off limits to men. That allowed me to show the unseen reality of life for ordinary Syrians, trying to live normal lives amid our struggle for freedom.

At the same time, I continued living my own life. I married and had a child. I found myself trying to balance so many different roles: Waad the mother, Waad the activist, Waad the citizen journalist and Waad the Director. All those people both embodied and led the story. Now I feel those different aspects of my life are what gives the film its strength.

I want people to understand that, while this is my story and shows what happened to me and my family, our experience is not unusual. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians experienced the same thing and are still doing so today. The dictator who committed these crimes is still in power, still killing innocent people. Our struggle for justice is as relevant today as it was when the revolution first began.

I felt a great burden of responsibility to the city, its people and to our friends – to tell their stories properly so they will never be forgotten and no-one can ever distort the truth of what we lived through.

Making the film was almost as hard as living through the years in Aleppo. I had to relive everything again and again. Thankfully I worked with a great team who cared so much about me, my story, and Syria. One person in particular is my fellow director, Edward Watts. He took the burden I carried onto his own shoulders and, with his strength added to my own, we were able to turn the vast complexity of my life and footage into the crafted story you see today.

EDWARD WATTS

This is the most important film I have ever worked on. I have been following the Syrian uprising since it began, trying to tell the truth beyond the lies and propaganda that have muddied people’s understanding of what happened in that country. That truth is embodied in the courage, honesty and altruism of Waad, Hamza and Sama. They are extraordinary people; an example to us all in these days of great tumult in the world.

In my documentaries I have always sought to highlight the humour and humanity we share with people living in desperate situations in the far flung corners of the world. That is the truth that

will save us, not the false divisions so many people peddle these days. Our failure to stand with ordinary Syrians when they were protesting for their freedom and were brutally crushed by the Assad regime has directly led to so many of the problems that affect us all today, from the birth of ISIS to the rise of the far right, the refugee crisis and the normalization of indiscriminate assaults against civilian populations in war.

Through Waad's story, the world can finally see what really happened, understand the depth of our tragic mistakes and hopefully rediscover the steel in our bones to ensure it never happens again. It has been an honour and a privilege to direct this film with her.

BIOGRAPHIES

Waad al-Kateab (Director)

In January 2016, Waad al-Kateab started documenting the horrors of Aleppo for Channel 4 News in a series of devastating films simply titled *Inside Aleppo*.

The reports she made for Channel 4 News on the conflict in Syria, and the most complex humanitarian crisis in the world, became the most watched pieces on the UK news programme – and received almost half a billion views online and won 24 awards – including the 2016 International Emmy for breaking news coverage.

Waad was a marketing student at the University of Aleppo when protests against the Assad regime swept the country in 2011. Like many hundreds of her fellow Syrians, she became a citizen journalist determined to document the horrors of the war.

She taught herself how to film – and started filming the human suffering around her as Assad forces battled rebels for control of Aleppo. She stayed through the devastating siege – documenting the terrible loss of life and producing some of the most memorable images of the six-year conflict. When she and her family were evacuated from Aleppo in December 2016 she managed to get all her footage out.

Waad lives in London with her husband Hamza and two daughters.

Edward Watts (Director)

Edward Watts is an Emmy award-winning, BAFTA nominated filmmaker who has directed over twenty narrative and documentary films that tell true stories of courage, heroism and humour

from across the world, covering everything from war crimes in the Congo to the colourful lives of residents in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

He has just completed his first feature documentary about the life of Waad al-Kateab a female Syrian filmmaker who recorded her life over 5 years in rebel-held Aleppo. It is an epic tale of love and courage amid the cruelty of war.

His 2015 film *Escape from ISIS* exposed the brutal treatment of the estimated 4 million women living under the rule of the Islamic State and, for the first time on television, told the extraordinary story of an underground network trying to save those it can. It received numerous international awards and citations, including an International Emmy and Bafta nomination for Best Current Affairs Documentary.

The Guardian described it as “a breathtakingly bold piece of journalism,” while the Spectator said it was “such an important documentary it ought to rank with the footage of British troops liberating Belsen.” Prime Minister David Cameron cited the film in a major policy speech on ISIS. Edward was also invited to testify at the US Congress about the film’s key findings at the Committee on Foreign Affairs in Washington DC in July 2015.

Among his other work, his first narrative short film *Oksijan told* the incredible true story of a 7-year-old Afghan boy’s fight to survive as he is smuggled to the UK in a refrigerated lorry and the air inside begins to run out. It premiered at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2017 and has since played at prestigious film festivals around the world.

Edward's filmmaking aspires to tell visceral, gripping stories about people who live in far flung corners of the world, to emphasise our common humanity to audiences back home. In so doing, he hopes his films can make a positive contribution to reducing the hatred in our tumultuous world. He has an eye for the unexpected: the intimacy found even in the bleakest places; the stories of hope amid horror. He creates films on a strong foundation of riveting narrative storytelling and striking, cinematic images.

Ben de Pear (Executive Producer) Ben de Pear is the editor of Channel 4 News, an award-winning nightly news programme in the UK. Under his editorship the programme has broken several global exclusives – most recently the ground breaking *Data, Democracy and Dirty Tricks*, the Cambridge Analytica undercover reports that led to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifying before Congress and the closure of data firm Cambridge Analytica. Channel 4 News has received over 100 other awards under his editorship – including numerous Royal Television Awards, two BAFTA’s and three International Emmy’s for news coverage in 2012, 2013 and 2016.

Nevine Mabro (Executive Producer) Nevine Mabro is Deputy Editor of Channel 4 News. She has led the programme’s agenda- setting foreign output, enhancing its ability to get extraordinary coverage out of some of the world’s most dangerous places. She finds and

nurtures new talent both on screen and off, and works with many independent filmmakers. She executive-produced Waad al-Kateab's award-winning *Inside Aleppo* coverage for Channel 4 News in 2016 as well as Marcel Mettelsiefen's *Agony in Aleppo* short film that won the 2013 Emmy and was developed into the Oscar-nominated film *Watani*.

Siobhan Sinnerton (Executive Producer) Siobhan Sinnerton is a commissioning editor for News and Current Affairs at Channel 4 in London. She also leads the channel's 360 and VR operations. She is an award-winning executive whose recent commissions including BAFTA and Emmy winning *Children on the Frontline* and *Escape from Isis*. She also looks after Channel 4's award-winning foreign affairs strand Unreported World. She was recognised in 2016 at the Cultural Diversity Network awards for her contribution to commissioning and developing a diverse range of talent both on and off screen.

George Waldrum (Executive Producer) A two-time Emmy award-winning executive producer, George Waldrum has worked across a number of documentaries winning many international accolades. These include awards from the Royal Television Society, the Foreign Press Association and Amnesty International. Waldrum has previously worked as a director filming across Africa, Asia and Central America tackling global themes such as migration, corruption and civil war.

Raney Aronson-Rath (Executive Producer, FRONTLINE) Raney Aronson-Rath is the executive producer of FRONTLINE, PBS' flagship investigative journalism series, and is a leading voice on the future of journalism. She has been internationally recognized for her work to expand FRONTLINE's reporting capacity and reimagining the documentary form across multiple platforms. From the emergence of ISIS in Syria to the hidden history of the NFL and concussions to the secret reality of rape on the job for immigrant women, Aronson-Rath oversees FRONTLINE's acclaimed reporting and directs the series' evolution and editorial vision. She has developed and managed dozens of in-depth, cross-platform journalism partnerships with outlets including ProPublica, The New York Times and Univision. Under her leadership, FRONTLINE has won every major award in broadcast journalism and dramatically expanded its digital footprint.

Dan Edge (Executive Producer) Dan Edge has produced and directed films from all over the world, in the main for FRONTLINE PBS, as well as for Channel 4, the BBC and HBO. His most recent film as a director, *Last Days of Solitary*, was a feature-length documentary telling the story of solitary confinement in US prisons. It was praised by critics as "revealing the dark truth of solitary", "a harrowing visceral documentary" and "unflinching and harrowing". Before that he filmed, produced and directed *Outbreak* – made during the height of the West African Ebola epidemic. The film won a BAFTA, Emmy, Grierson and numerous other awards. As a senior producer for FRONTLINE PBS, he has overseen *Mosul* (dir: Olivier Sarbil and James Jones) *Exodus* (dir: James Bleumel); *Children of Syria* (dir: Marcel Mettelsiefen); and many other films.

Chloë Lambourne (Offline Editor) Chloë Lambourne is a Grierson award-winning editor. She

trained at the prestigious National Film and Television School, where she was awarded the David Lean scholarship. She has over 10 years' experience editing documentary films from long form cinema features to broadcast television. Chloe brings an intelligent and sensitive approach to the most complex and challenging subjects to tell stories with humour and compassion. She has worked on many award winning series, including the 2nd series of BAFTA and Emmy award winning Exodus, which looked at the human cost of the global refugee crisis.

Simon McMahon (Offline Editor) BAFTA winning editor Simon McMahon has worked across a wide range of documentaries throughout his career, tackling numerous themes and issues. He edited the film *My Son the Jihadi*, which won a BAFTA for best single documentary at the 2016 BAFTA television awards, and was also nominated for an International Emmy and a BAFTA craft award for best factual editing that year. He's since been nominated for a BAFTA for the series about child mental health, *Kids on the Edge*, where he edited all 3 films, and was subsequently nominated for a BAFTA in 2018 for the film *Louis Theroux, Talking to Anorexia*.

CHANNEL 4 NEWS Channel 4 News is a multi-award-winning nightly news programme in the UK. Ever risk-taking in its high-impact, agenda-setting journalism, Channel 4 News is consistently lauded for going beyond the headlines to fearlessly tackle the stories that often go unreported elsewhere. It is the most distinctive video news provider in Britain on every major output platform and the biggest news programme on social media in the UK with a digital viewership of half a billion minutes viewed on Facebook and YouTube so far in 2019.

ITN PRODUCTIONS ITN Productions is the award-winning factual arm of ITN, producing films and series for major networks in the UK and internationally. Our programmes have received Oscar and Nobel Peace Prize nominations, as well as winning multiple BAFTA, Emmy and Royal Television Society awards. We are one of Britain's leading documentary producers, and our film *Children on the Frontline* is the most decorated Channel 4 documentary of all time.

CHANNEL 4 Channel 4 is a publicly-owned yet commercially-funded public service broadcaster and has a remit to be innovative, experimental and distinctive. Its public ownership and not-for-profit status ensure all profit generated by its commercial activity is directly reinvested back into the delivery of its public service remit. As a publisher-broadcaster, Channel 4 is also required to commission UK content from the independent production sector and currently works with around 300 creative companies across the UK every year. Documentaries and current affairs are key areas for the

channel, and its international coverage has won numerous international awards.

FRONTLINE FRONTLINE, U.S. television's longest running investigative documentary series, explores the issues of our times through powerful storytelling. FRONTLINE has won every major journalism and broadcasting award, including 91 Emmy Awards and 20 Peabody Awards. Visit pbs.org/frontline and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Tumblr](#) and [Google+](#) to learn more. FRONTLINE is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS. Funding for FRONTLINE is provided through the support of PBS viewers and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Major funding for FRONTLINE is provided by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Additional funding is provided by the Abrams Foundation, the Park Foundation, the John and Helen Glessner Family Trust and the FRONTLINE Journalism Fund with major support from Jon and Jo Ann Hagler on behalf of the Jon L. Hagler Foundation.

PBS DISTRIBUTION

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CREDITS

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EDWARD WATTS

Filmed and Produced by
WAAD AL-KATEAB

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ARSHAAD

Guitarists

MALCOLM LAWS
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Managing Editor
ANDREW METZ

Managing Director
JIM BRACCIALE

Executive Producer
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For PBS Distribution
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SARA GIUSTINI

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All citizen journalists and journalists who reported from
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Everyone who felt our loss around the world
لكو صخش انكراش انتراسخ لوح ملاعلا

Friends we lost and friends we gained

For Syria, Aleppo, my home

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WISAM, ZAIN & NAYA OLA &
AHMAD OM MAJED & SHAM
MANAL, SAMAR & OM EBRAHIM
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& M. ZAZA ABDALFATAH & NABIL
ABD ALKADER, MILAD &
BEBARS Dr. MAHMOUD KANNAS
Dr. ABDALSALAM DAIEF OM
YAHYA & M. KAYARI OM ADEL &
OM MAHMOUD

For all those who were arbitrarily detained or killed by the regime,
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NELSON

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