Gulf filmmakers at Doha Film Festival 2026 call for wider distribution of regional cinema

Doha, Qatar; November 24, 2026: Gulf cinema has talent and stories, but too few of its films reach cinema screens, commented filmmakers at the Voices of the Gulf press briefing session at Doha Film Festival (DFF) 2026. The panel brought together director and producer Hisham Fqih, bringing his debut horror feature ***Soulala*** to the Festival; director and actor Ahd Kamel, with her award-winning ***My Driver and I***; and director, writer and producer Haya Alghanim, who brought her documentary ***An Evening with Laila***.

Fqih said Egyptian cinema still leads across the Arab world but distributors in the region give priority to international films. "Once a film is made, distribution has a life of its own. Even in Saudi Arabia, these films are shown in a limited way. We need distributors with the courage to take them on," he said.

Alghanim added: "I have worked with independent distribution and learnt how distributors think. Their thinking is commercial, and they are afraid to try new things. There has to be more demand to watch Gulf films on the platforms, because there is still resistance to Arab and Gulf films."

Kamel said: "When I started, it was women making films in Saudi Arabia. I am proud to see so many more female directors, writers and actors today. The bigger challenge now is making a film at all. The industry here is still young, and we are working out how to raise funds, how to distribute and monetise a film, and how to find its audience."

Alghanim added that women in the Gulf have always contributed across industries and are now leading change in film. "We have to work twice as hard for half as much and keep proving ourselves. It is not easy in a male-dominated field, but the change happens with each film we make," she said.

Fqih said international films dominate the top ten horror titles at the Saudi box office. "Copying foreign films is a trap many producers and directors fall into and often the quality is low. I wanted stories from our own legacy, and that carries a responsibility for accuracy. We brought in foreign experts for prosthetics, but our cast is 100% Arab and 90% of our crew is Arab. I hope others will build on what we learnt," he said.

Alghanim said she found Laila Abdulaziz's story while researching 1980s Kuwait. She realised that few people knew the woman behind more than 300 songs. "I set my other project aside to tell the world her story and the history of music in Kuwait," she said.

Cinema Alkhaleej brings together films from from the region that explore identity, heritage, social change and family relationships.

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