

An Open Letter From the Filmmakers of the 40th Montreal World Film Festival

Dear Mr. Serge Losique, Mr. Denis Coderre, Mr. Luc Fortin and Mrs. Mélanie Joly,

We are the young filmmakers whose films were selected to screen at the prestigious 40th Montreal World Film Festival. Many of us flew great distances from different countries including Finland, Colombia, Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, Israel and the USA with great excitement to see our films shown on the big screen.

However, when we arrived at the festival offices and found out that our screenings had been cancelled without any prior notice, we felt humiliated and outraged. Most of us found out after we had already landed in Montreal. The few remaining festival staff members insisted that they had sent cancellation notices, but none of us had received any such notices, and no news was posted on the festival website. Filmmakers were left in the dark and many proceeded to embark on their flights as scheduled. But others were lucky and found out in time to cancel their flights, unfortunately amounting to hundreds of dollars in cancellation fees. Although many of us suffered financial losses due to this turn of events, the loss of our festival experience was the greater misfortune. For many, this would have been a first festival experience: an opportunity to see our work projected on the big screen, to connect with new audiences, to see the work of other young filmmakers, and to make connections with future collaborators. It's a huge loss to say the least. Your negligence and mismanagement has closed those doors for us, Mr. Losique.

Currently, neither you nor anyone else from the festival management has officially taken responsibility or has made any public apology. We understand that festivals hold the right to not screen films that have been accepted into their festival. But our frustration does not lie in the simple fact that our films were not screened: it's about the fact that this all could have been avoided, that the festival's downward spiral was known. The FFM has been doomed for a while. And you, Mr. Losique, have been stubborn and negligent, plowing ahead to satisfy your delusions and not meeting the demands of the festival. Even after SODEC and Telefilm stopped supplying funding to the festival in 2014, you continued to arrogantly manage the festival despite the insufficient resources. The following year, in 2015, this financial turmoil led you to be unable to pay your employees. Consequently, this year, four days before the festival's opening night, the majority of your team quit because of the unfavorable work conditions you submitted them to. Two days after, Cineplex had to back out as well due to the disorganized state and financial uncertainty of

the festival. The festival crumbled under your command. We are upset at your outright lack of respect, transparency, and organization.

In the midst of all of this chaos, the festival continued with the opening night and the small fraction of other screenings throughout the following days. After investing so much time, effort and finances into our films, we feel deceived, insulted, outraged and humiliated. We feel we deserve better answers from the organizers of the festival and you, Mr. Losique. You have not even tried to communicate to us. We feel frustrated and saddened by the lack of leadership, general atmosphere of indifference and denial of our predicament. There is almost no staff to organize anything in response to this turn of events, no publicity, no audience, no film market, no one to talk to, no answers, and worst of all no screenings of our films. And we realize that we are not the only ones to suffer this loss. We understand that there are dozens and dozens of other films that were cut as well. Many filmmakers have been left in the dark.

We are deeply upset by what has happened but we have also been relieved by the support that other organizations have offered us in the Montreal community: notably the Canadian Friends of Tel Aviv University, the Goethe-Institute, the Israeli General Consulat and the Segal Center. We recognize that Montreal is a center for the arts and cultures, but we believe that you are no longer the person to organize such a community. Despite decades of success of this festival due to your initiative, you clearly no longer have the capacity or the public trust to run this on your own. It is time to give a chance to other members of the arts and cultures community to create space for filmmakers like us. If you truly believe in your project, Mr. Losique, it will have to not be in your hands.

We ask that the festival management, in particular you Mr. Losique, make an official, public apology with a clear statement of what has happened, acknowledging your neglect, mismanagement and arrogance in the festival's organization this year. We ask that a formal press release take place to acknowledge all of the films that were accepted and subsequently cut from the festival program. And we ask that you, Mr. Losique, seriously consider passing the torch onto someone else.

Signed,

Zoé Arthur
Yang Zhang

Moriya Benavot
Eric Brunt
Farhad Ghaderi
Tyler Ritchie
Andy Alvarez
Mintie Pardoe
Estelle Abou
Aline Hochscheid
Lee Nechushtan
Juan Sebastián Martínez Mora
Igor Poplauhlin
Ali Ajmeri
Phillpp Fussenegger
Erez Mizrahi
Sahar Shavit
Boris Kuboff
Katharina Rivilis
Chorong Kim
Nathan Starzynski