



Press release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01, 8/4/2016

fiveFilms4freedom reaches 140 million people and launches first ever global LGBT influencers list in 2016

The British Council – the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities – and BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival today announce the phenomenal success of the fiveFilms4freedom campaign in 2016, which reached over 140 million people and unveiled a list of 33 inspiring leaders from around the world who promote freedom, equality and LGBT rights every day.

fiveFilms4freedom is the world’s first – and largest – digital celebration of LGBT film has in 2016 reached more than 140 million people in 179 countries globally, with the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands and Germany amongst the countries where the films were watched the most.

From 16–27 March 2016, audiences in London enjoyed the 30th edition of BFI Flare, the UK’s leading lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) film festival. At the same time fiveFilms4freedom made five films from the festival available for free online. They were polished, rough, funny, sad and inspiring, and each had a different voice.

The total reach of fiveFilms4freedom was 140.5 million people with more than 1.5 million views of the films. Russia, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iraq were amongst the countries where the films were viewed the most with small participation from countries including Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea and the Maldives.

The films were:

SWIRL Two girls, young and in love, move backwards through the city in Petersen Vargas’ lyrical short from the Philippines.

XAVIER A film by Brazilian director Ricky Mastro about a father who notices that his 11-year-old son pays a lot of attention to slightly older boys.

BREATHE A British-Irish film by James Doherty, about an Irish traveller who is increasingly concerned that his son is 'soft', so sets about toughening him up.

TAKE YOUR PARTNERS In this British short film by director Siri Rødnes, Miss Paterson expects Ollie to make an Easter bonnet like the other girls. But Ollie is not like the other girls.

THE ORCHID A man has something important to tell his son, but can only get through to his voicemail in this film by Spanish director Ferran Navarro-Beltrán.

At the same time the British Council has released the **fiveFilms4freedom 2016 Global List** – 33 inspiring people from around the world promoting LGBT rights every day. The list is the result of a global social media campaign to help find inspiring people who are using culture to promote freedom and equality, who are provoking debate, or who are risking their lives to promote the rights of LGBT people in their society or country. The list includes inspirational people from India, Italy, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Uganda and the UK.

You can view the full list here: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/fivefilms4freedom/2016-global-list>

Alan Gemmell, Director fiveFilms4freedom, British Council, said: *"In only its second year, fiveFilms4freedom has become the world's biggest online LGBT film festival. By bringing the British Council's global network in over 100 countries together with the British Film Institute and five amazing film makers we've helped more than 1.5 million people in 170 countries watch a movie - promoting freedom, equality and people's right to be who they are."*

Geng Le, founder of China's leading LGBT web portal and social media app Blued, said: *"The films I saw at fivefilms4freedom really reflected my experiences: the confusion I went through about my sexuality, the discrimination I have felt, the importance of equality and fairness. That's the beauty of the festival - we could all see ourselves in the selection and I hope it encourage more dialogue, debate and acceptance around the world."*

Tricia Tuttle, Deputy Director of Festivals at the BFI, said: *"It's so inspiring to see such a vast global community come together to celebrate fiveFilmsforfreedom and love as a fundamental human right. Working with the British Council to make this happen has been fantastic - bring on 2017!"*

Notes to Editors:

About fiveFilms4freedom

fiveFilms4freedom ran alongside BFI Flare 2016, the British Film Institute's LGBT Film Festival. Using the BFI player and the British Council's global network it promoted five films from this year's Flare Festival to people all over the world.

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.

We work in more than 100 countries and our 8,000 staff – including 2,000 teachers – work with thousands of professionals and policy makers and millions of young people every year by teaching English, sharing the arts and delivering education and society programmes. We are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter. A core publicly-funded grant provides 20 per cent of our turnover which last year was £864 million. The rest of our revenues are earned from services which customers around the world pay for, such as English classes and taking UK examinations, and also through education and development contracts and from partnerships with public and private organisations. All our work is in pursuit of our charitable purpose and supports prosperity and security for the UK and globally.

For more information, please visit: www.britishcouncil.org.

About BFI Flare

BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival is the UK's longest running LGBT film event. It began in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures. By its 3rd edition it was tagged the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and since then has grown to become the largest LGBT film event in the UK, and its most anticipated. The Festival changed its name to BFI Flare in 2014 to reflect the increasing diversity of the audience and programme. Last year's festival saw admissions of over 23,000. The festival is programmed by Jason Barker, Jay Bernard, Michael Blyth, Brian Robinson and Emma Smart, led by Deputy Head of Festivals, Tricia Tuttle and Head of Festivals, Clare Stewart.

The full programme of BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival included 50 feature films, an expanded industry programme, selected films on BFI Player VOD service, a series of special events and archive screenings. fiveFilms4freedom saw Flare offer five LGBT short films for

free across the world and promoted through the British Council's global networks. The festival ran from 16th March – 27th March 2016. www.bfi.org.uk/Flare