



9/11 Film Festival Opening Remarks

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A film festival - It doesn't immediately occur to us as the most obvious or even the most natural way of commemorating those who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

But, if you consider what is about to unfold here over the next 4 days, then I think you'll realize and likely agree with me that, in fact, this festival is a most poignant and beautiful tribute to the more than 3000 people who died on that horrible morning just two years ago.

And the reason I say that is because this festival, it seems to me, is about a few different things. First and foremost, it's about remembering. About remembering the people whose names many of us do not know, whose faces we never saw, but who we know were loved and are missed by families and friends across this entire planet.

More than 80 nations lost fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers that morning - in what seemed like an instant.

We must remember them so that we are resolved in our commitment to do battle with terrorism - wherever it rears its ugly face.

We must remember them so that we are resolved to stay the course in this life and death battle with terrorists and with those who give them comfort or support anywhere.

President Bush said in the days following 9/11, that the terrorists' acts "may shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve." And I know that you stand with America in this belief as well.

Secondly - this Festival is about the creative spirit. Especially that creative spirit which is born in adversity - something which I am learning that people of Kosovo know a great deal about. By now, many of you have heard that the idea for this festival came when our friend and one of the Festival organizers, Blare-ream Jot-si [Blerim Gjoci] saw the cleanup after a US Office - Fourth of July concert. As much fun as he had had at the concert, Blerim thought how quickly it was over. And he realized that in a few short hours, you could pass by the place where the concert was held and never have any idea about what had occurred there two hours earlier.

And so with his colleagues, they found a way to use that special creative spirit of Kosovo to make something permanent in honor of those lost on 9/11. And, thus, the idea of an independent film, design and sculpture festival was born.

When I think about independent film makers, I'm also reminded about the spirit of 'rugged individualism' that helped to forge the American Frontier - our wild west.

These were men and women who were unafraid of a challenge; who were willing to go up against great odds; ready to take great risks - all for the chance to realize their dreams.

And in many ways, so it is with independent filmmakers. I think Mr. Kaufman will agree, that life for those who make indies - as they are sometimes called- is rarely easy. But is it something that the creative spirit demands from them, like a jealous muse from mythology.

Look at what these seven filmmakers have prepared for us over these next 4 days. Look at the sculptures and designs prepared for this festival as well - and then look at why they have done so... Because of what happened on September 11, 2001. For me personally, it is very moving to see people who so love America that you have dedicated your time, your talents, your creative spirits as artists to give life to a dream: the possibility of a world

without terrorism, a world where neighbors are at peace with each other, where tolerance for different ideas, different faiths, different cultures are among our highest shared values.

Which brings me to my last point. The third thing that it seems to me that this festival is about - is unity. Both the unity of Americans and people of Kosovo - which is truly legendary; and the unity each of us as a human being shares with those who have suffered at the hands of terrorists and extremists throughout the globe.

For the last two years, I have lived in the West African city of Ouagadougou in the nation of Burkina Faso. Even from so far away a place as that, I heard through colleagues in the State Department of the incredible outpouring of support that people of Kosovo showed to America both on September 11, 2001, and in the very difficult days and nights that we faced immediately after that terrible tragedy.

But even if I hadn't heard of it, I see it now for myself. Still today, almost two years later, with billboards in memory of the day; with memorial ceremonies too many to number; with this very Film Festival, I see the strong and incredible support that you have offered to us and as a witness to peace for the rest of the world.

We know - all of us - that there is more work to be done in fighting terrorism. We have seen too recently with the deaths of our colleagues at the U.N in Baghdad as well as bombings in Najaaf, and in Bali, Jakarta and India, as well, that there is much left to do before our world is free from these desperate madmen.

We know that their way leads only to death and misery. Their answer to life's challenges is weak and cowardly and is about only destruction. It knows nothing of the power of the creative spirit.

Today, this remembrance is just the opposite. This Festival is the answer of a civilized society that they - the terrorists - fear the most because it celebrates our unity and our diversity; our ability to accept and to tolerate each other no matter what our differences. This they simply cannot understand.

Todd Beamer, on Flight # 93, on the morning of September 11th will forever be remembered for uttering that call-to-action to his fellow captives moments before they died. "Let's roll," he said. ... It's reminds me a little bit of the phrase I associate with the start of a movie "Roll 'em" - So perhaps it's fitting that I paraphrase Todd Beamer this afternoon and say "Let's Roll 'em" as I officially declare the 9/11 Film Festival to be now open! Thank you all very much.