

On 23 October Ciné-ONU screened 'Moldovan Miracle' at Cinéma Galeries in Brussels, in partnership with the Human Rights Regional Office for Europe and The Norwegian Embassy to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



'Moldovan Miracle' follows Moldova's only optometrist, Hans Bjørn Bakketeig, and the eye-doctor, Tatiana Ghidirimschi, in their struggle to establish the first low vision centre in the country. Before the Norwegian optometrist visited in 2001, it was common practice to simply hide visually impaired children away and leave them to their fate. He moved to the country, took up residence in a hotel room, and has since treated more than 10,000 people.

After the screening, there was a panel discussion with Hans Bjørn Bakketeig, star of Moldovan Miracle, Ludmila Tiganu, Communications Specialist at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Claude Cahn, Human Rights Officer in the Regional Office for Europe of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner (OHCHR). Carlos Jimenez, from the UN's Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) moderated. The context of the discussion was Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that everyone is

entitled to a social and international order in which human rights and freedoms can be fully realized, and more specifically, the problem of corruption and its impact on human rights.



To open the discussion, the panelists were asked about their reactions to the film, to which Ludmila Tiganu, a Moldovan native, replied: “It’s sad. I had very sad feelings watching this documentary because I still see that there are a lot of challenges to overcome in Moldova. People do not have access to good healthcare and children are still being left behind because their parents have to go abroad to find work. That said, thanks to the work of Hans, I am more hopeful.”

Claude Cahn said: “It’s a distressing film which shows a very troubled country – one in the grips of serious and nearly all-pervasive corruption. But what you also see in the film is the work of very remarkable individuals, like Hans and Tatiana. This is really the spirit of the UN’s human rights-based development work: to support the work of people and communities, and to endeavor to advance good governance.”

Hans Bjørn Bakketeig explained that becoming an optometrist was predetermined for him: “My father was an optometrist and my brother, so to be an optometrist actually wasn’t my choice, but I don’t regret anything. My first trip to Moldova was in 2001. When I came to the blind school, shown in the film, there was about 150 students - 50% of whom should not have been there. In fact, a lot of the cases were easy to treat but it cost a lot of money to do so. After we treated them, we took them out of the blind school so that they could go to a regular school. Now, there’s only 25 children left in the blind school!”

He continued: “We had many ups and downs as we tried to set up the eye clinic. We almost gave up - corruption was a big issue for us - but then we had a small step forward which allowed us to continue. Now, we are losing funding. From the new year I will most likely no longer have my job. But I want to continue and find a solution for the future. Perhaps, together with the UN and UNDP, we could continue our work in Moldova. I know that if we could give

doctors the equipment and the space they need to work, they would not leave Moldova.”



Claude Cahn noted that Moldova does not have an independent media. All televised media is under the control of the government or oligarchs. So the screening of films with themes not popular with the public – such as the human rights of LGBTI people – or even of relatively uplifting themes such as this one, is very difficult. Lack of an independent media makes democratic development very difficult.

Amid the discussion, one Moldovan member of the audience (whose family had moved abroad for a better quality of life) used the opportunity to thank Hans for the work that he has achieved: “Your work gives hope to us about one person being able to change the world.”

- To see pictures from the evening, [click here](#).
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