

# ‘Gaza:’ An uplifting study of a land in turmoil



CHENNAI: There can be few things more heartrending than the plight of people living without jobs, clean drinking water, and crammed into a narrow stretch of land blockaded on all sides.

But this is the reality of Gaza, where two million Palestinians live as virtual prisoners. Once described by former British Prime Minister David Cameron as an “open-air prison,” Gaza is hemmed in by Egypt, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. The borders are nearly always closed.

It is this tiny strip of land – 25 miles long and seven miles wide – which is the subject of the documentary “Gaza,” directed by Garry Keane and Andrew McConnell. It premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in the US on Tuesday.

What is remarkably elevating about Gaza is the resilience of the people who have made it their home. The documentary contrasts the daily sufferings with the simple joys of those who live there. Despite grinding poverty, some push themselves to play sport, dance and sing, and celebrate weddings and other ceremonies with seemingly not a care in the world.

The music is occasionally punctuated by the wails of mothers who have lost their children to Israeli shelling, which is answered by angry crowds of stone-throwing Palestinians.

This film is an enriching portrait of a territory facing perpetual conflict. There have been three wars there, and when the group Hamas came to power in 2006, Israel moved out of Gaza, destroying its settlements and imposing a debilitating blockade in the process.

There is a telling scene of 19-year-old Kamal standing by the sea and longing for the freedom to travel. With the unemployment rate at 50 percent and electricity available for only four hours a day, the UN predicts the Gaza Strip will no longer be fit for habitation by 2020.

Yet life there goes on: We see a teacher, barber and student going about their affairs, and a man enjoying a coffee by the beach and exchanging pleasantries with passersby.

Despite all the gloom and sorrow, the humanity, color and joy of this documentary still manages to leave the viewer feeling uplifted.

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