76. Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Berlinale Panorama

الجانب الآخر من الشمس

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN

A FILM BY
TAWFIK SABOUNI

PRODUCED BY DÉRIVES
HABILIS PRODUCTIONS
CLIN D'OEIL FILMS

WITH MAHMOUD ALQADAH, ABDELKAFI ALHAJ, MOHAMMAD HAMKI, ABDELHAMID JAQUE CINEMATOGRAPHY SAMEER ORABI SOUND BILAL SULTAN EDITING DANI ABO LOUH SOUND EDITING LUCAS LAUWERS ORIGINAL MUSIC SAMI ABOU LOUH MIXING ALEK GOOSSE COLOR GRADING THOMAS BOUFFIOULX WRITTEN BY TAWFIK SABOUNI AND LAURINE ESTRADE PRODUCED BY JULIE FRERES, JEAN-BAPTISTE BONNET CO-PRODUCED BY HANNE PHLYPO LINE PRODUCER ZIAD ALI IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH RTBF (TÉLÉVISION BELGE), WALLONIE IMAGE PRODUCTION, SHELTER PROD, RED SEA FUND WITH THE SUPPORT OF CENTRE DU CINÉMA ET DE L'AUDIOVISUEL DE LA FÉDÉRATION WALLONIE-BRUXELLES, FLANDERS AUDIOVISUAL FUND (VAF), TAXSHELTER.BE AND ING, TAX SHELTER OF THE BELGIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, COOPÉRATION BELGE AU DÉVELOPPEMENT, LOTERIE NATIONALE, ORANGE BELGIUM, SACD, SCREEN.BRUSSELS, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE, RÉGION NORMANDIE, BROUILLON D'UN RÊVE DE LA SCAM, EUROPEAN UNION, IMS, ALJAZEERA DOCUMENTARY CHANNEL WORLD SALES ANDANAFILMS

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN

A film by Tawfik Sabouni

Belgium - France - 2026 - 88 minutes

Image format 1.85 - Color - Sound 5.1

Produced by Dérives and Habilis Productions
in coproduction with Clin d'Oeil Films

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LOGLINE

After the fall of Assad's regime, Tawfik Sabouni returns to Sednaya, the infamous Syrian prison, with fellow survivors. Within its walls, reenactment becomes a way to give voice to memory, absence, and survival.



SYNOPSIS

Years ago, filmmaker Tawfik Sabouni was released from Sednaya, the infamous Syrian prison known as “the other side of the sun”. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Assad’s regime and the liberation of Syria’s prisons in December 2024, he returns to this site of detention to confront and reclaim the memory of his captivity.

This documentary film does not seek to reopen wounds, but to restore what systematic violence tried to erase: voices, stories, and humanity. Built on trust and collaboration, Sabouni invites four fellow survivors of Sednaya to join him. Together, they return to the physical spaces of their imprisonment and engage in a carefully constructed reenactment of daily rituals, gestures, and moments of survival.

Filmed inside the former prison, reenactment becomes a means to express what language alone cannot contain. With restraint, *“The Other Side of the Sun”* confronts the viewer with the enduring marks of imprisonment, creating an experience that is profoundly unsettling and emotionally devastating. By giving presence to those who disappeared, the film bears witness for families still searching for answers and contributes to Syria’s effort to reckon with the legacy of its prisons.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In March 2011, the Syrian revolution upended my life and that of an entire people. For the first time, freedom took to the streets, and I did what I had long dreamed of doing: I filmed. Arrested by the regime's police, I was sent to Sednaya prison in Damascus. To this day, that prison continues to haunt me. While I was able to leave it behind and rebuild my life in Belgium, tens of thousands of people disappeared in the prisons of the Assad regime including my cousins Basel and Zaher.

This film is a testimony carried by the voices of five survivors. Through our memories and our stories, it seeks to understand what happens behind the walls of Sednaya and the reasons for these disappearances.

I began working on this film in 2022. At that time, I had no access to the prison except through my memory. That is why I decided to build, in a studio, a prison set inspired by the images etched in my mind. As we were preparing this set, the Assad regime fell. It became clear to me that the film had to be shot in Syria, inside the real Sednaya prison, in order to confront the images of my memory with reality.



SEDNAYA'S PRISON

Located some 30 km north of Damascus, Sednaya Prison was mainly used to detain political opponents, activists and protesters against the Assad regime.

It was considered one of the worst prisons in the world. It was the scene of systematic torture and mass executions. Tens of thousands of Syrians have disappeared after being arrested and taken to this prison. After the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, all detainees were released during the night of December 7–8, 2024.



TAWFIK SABOUNI

Tawfik Sabouni is a Belgian-Syrian filmmaker and screenwriter born in Damascus in 1989.
At school, he joins a theater group. As a teenager, he decides to pursue filmmaking. There is no film school in his country, so he chooses to study law. At the same time, he continues working in theater and in radio. Then comes the Syrian revolution in 2011. Tawfik Sabouni picks up a camera. He films, documents, and records what the state wants to erase. He is arrested and imprisoned in Sednaya. After his release, he flees Syria.

In 2015, he arrives in Belgium. After studying law, he pursues film directing at INSAS in Brussels, graduating in 2022. He also studies acting and works as a director for radio and as a dubbing actor for television. His short films *“On the edge of madness”* (2021) and *“Stateless”* (2022) screen at international festivals. Tawfik Sabouni draws on his own experience to create films of rare emotional intensity, offering a deeply unsettling space for collective testimony and reclaimed memory.



OTHER CHARACTERS OF THE FILM



Mahmoud Alqadah – 34 years old

Construction worker, Mahmoud was arrested at his home in Idlib with his four brothers when Assad's army arrived in their village. He spent several years in prison and lost one of his brothers there.



Abdelkafi Alhaj – 43 years old

Factory worker, Abdelkafi was arrested in 2011 in Homs on his way home from work. He is the father of four children, and his wife was pregnant with their fourth child at the time of his arrest. He met this child for the first time when he was eight years old.



Abdelhamid Jadoue – 29 years old

Pastry chef, Abdelhamid was 16 when he was arrested. He was still at school and wanted to continue his education, but prison robbed him of his youth. He was arrested because his brother was an opponent of the regime, and he was used as a means of blackmail. Abdelhamid spent several years in prison and was tortured for refusing to denounce his brother.



Mohamad Hamki – 29 years old

Restaurant Worker. Like Abdelhamid, Mohamad was 16 when he was arrested. He was on his way home from school when regime forces detained him. The only ‘charge’ against him was written on his identity card: he was born in a neighbourhood of Homs known for its opposition to the Assad regime. Being born in a neighbourhood opposed to the regime was considered a crime, which cost him several years of his childhood and youth.





CREDITS

Belgium - France - 88’ - 2026

Director: Tawfik Sabouni

With: Mahmoud Alqadah, Abdelkafi Alhaj, Mohammad Hamki, Abdelhamid Jadoue

Written by: Tawfik Sabouni, Laurine Estrade

Produced by: Julie Freres (Dérives - Belgium), Jean-Baptiste Bonnet (Habilis Productions - France)

Co-produced by: Hanne Phlypo - Clin d’œil Films (Belgium)

Executive Producer: Ziad Ali

Cinematographer: Sameer Orabi

Editor: Dani Abo Louh

Sound Engineer: Bilal Sultan

Sound Editor: Lucas Lauwers

Original Music: Sami Abou Louh

Mixer: Alek Goosse

Colorist: Thomas Bouffioulx

In co-production with: RTBF (Télévision Belge) Unité documentaire ; Wallonie Image Production; Shelter Prod; Red Sea Fund

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