

Exceptional guests and return of the public for the 20th anniversary of the FIFDH

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Writing / ATS

The 20th edition this year will be the last directed by Isabelle Gattiker for the FIFDH in Geneva (archives).

Photo: KEYSTONE/SALVATORE DI NOLFI

In Geneva, the International Film Festival on Human Rights (FIFDH) will find its audience for its 20th anniversary, after two editions in line with the pandemic. From March 4 to 13, women and racism in Switzerland are the favorite themes of the anniversary edition.

This edition, unveiled on Tuesday in Geneva, will also be the last directed by Isabelle Gattiker who will then take up her new position in the canton of Geneva. The boss of the FIFDH is delighted to be able to meet the public before leaving the festival. "It's a lot of emotion and a relief too," she told the press.

In 20 years, the FIFDH has undergone "tremendous" change, according to her. "We can compete with the biggest halls", while remaining "irreverent", "militant", "optimistic" and "free", she welcomes.

On a personal note, she particularly remembers the debate from Moscow a few years ago with the American whistleblower Edward Snowden or the international tour of the festival over two years. "There is still a lot to do" for his successor, she says. Like bringing in the American actress Jane Fonda, whom Ms. Gattiker would like to see in Geneva. "We were close" to having her and she wants to participate, she says.

This year, the FIFDH will be resolutely turned towards women. Opened by the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, it will be dedicated to the Vietnamese journalist and activist Pham Doan Trang, detained for several months in her country. As well as the general secretary of the union of domestic workers in Trinidad and Tobago, Ida Leblanc who will receive a prize.

Black Swiss

Among the guests, the American whistleblower Chelsea Manning will speak about the human rights effects linked to digital data. She had seen her 35-year prison sentence commuted by court-martial, after relaying hundreds of thousands of confidential military and diplomatic documents to WikiLeaks. A situation that still earns WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange the threat of 175 years in prison in the United States.

US abortion rights activist Paxton Smith, World Trade Organization (WTO) Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi will also attend. Another symbol, half of the thirty films presented were made by women or representatives of gender minorities.

Among the various themes, racism is again widely discussed. The situation in Switzerland will be discussed this time through two debates.

After controversies that have targeted other cities, the first will look at the racist heritage in Geneva monuments. A study was requested by the City of Geneva from two professors from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) and should be unveiled at the beginning of March.

But the debate will widen to the whole country, a few weeks after the virulent criticisms of the members of the working group of the UN on people of African descent. These had in particular denounced "systemic racism" in Switzerland. The discussion will focus on black Swiss women around the documentary "I am black". Isabelle Gattiker adds:

"Systemic racism applies to Switzerland and it must be affirmed"

China, Yazidis or also ecocides

Among other issues discussed, China will also be at the center of the festival. Hong Kong activist and former parliamentarian Nathan Law will attend. As well as a Uyghur survivor, while Beijing is targeted by many governments, including Switzerland, to retain more than a million representatives

of this minority in internment camps. Discussions on the children of jihadists in Syria or on ecocides are also planned.

In addition to "I am black", several films will be shown in world premiere. In particular on the genocide of the Yazidis or on Colombia, in the presence of the former leader of the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Rodrigo Londoño.

The fiction competition jury will be chaired by Afghan filmmaker Shahrbanoo Sadat and the documentary jury by Cambodian director Rithy Panh. Around the festival, the educational component is renewed. Workshops, "street art", a concert, podcasts or exhibitions will be planned.

