



WINNER Special Jury Prize, South by Southwest Film Festival 2010

WINNER Karen Schmeer Award for Excellence in Editing, IFFBoston 2010

WINNER Taiwan International Documentary Festival, First Merit Prize 2010

WINNER Cinereach Award presented by Human Rights Watch Film Festival 2010

WINNER Festival International du Film des Droits de L'Homme, Best Film Award, Investigative Report Jury

Nominated for two Emmy Awards 2011

Outstanding Continuing Coverage Of A News Story – Long Form

Outstanding Editing

Debuts WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 29, 2010 (8:00-9:30 p.m. ET/PT), exclusively on HBO2

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

Rebecca Richman Cohen, Director/Producer
Racing Horse Productions
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SALES / PRESS INQUIRIES:

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To view trailer or download stills go to: www.wardondonfilm.com // Running Time: 85 min // High Def Video

After ten years of violent civil war, Sierra Leoneans were relieved in 2002 when the brutal war was over (exclaimed as “war don don” in the Krio language), but the painful memories of murder, systematic rape and dismemberment remained. *WAR DON DON*, directed by first-time filmmaker Rebecca Richman Cohen, follows the war crimes trial of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel leader Issa Sesay, exploring the complex relationship between individual accountability, collective reconciliation and the limits of international justice when the documentary debuts WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 29, 2010 (8:00-9:30 p.m. ET/PT), exclusively on HBO2.

Other HBO2 playdate: Sept. 30, 2010 (2:30 p.m.)

From 1991 to 2001, the RUF fought to overthrow the ruling government of Sierra Leone. In 2003, after the end of the war, the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone spent more than \$200 million building a Special Court to seek justice and reconciliation, setting up the world’s first international war crimes “hybrid tribunal.”

Three years in the making, *WAR DON DON* draws on unprecedented access to the inner workings of the defense and prosecution in Issa Sesay’s trial, including access to Sesay himself, exploring the contradictions of a man who dealt in blood diamonds, commanded child soldiers and was blamed for mass atrocities against civilians, while also being credited by some with single-handedly ending the war.

The prosecution, led by Stephen Rapp (who was recently appointed Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues by President Obama), argues that the trial is supposed to assess the guilt of those at the top, who routinely turned a blind eye to the misdeeds of men under their command. Wayne Jordash, Sesay’s lead defense lawyer, counters that his client was an uneducated young man who was coerced into fighting. Moreover, he says, “Any process which isn’t prepared to examine itself is fundamentally flawed. You [the Special Court] have such an impetus towards convicting everybody before the Court, and that doesn’t lend itself to a truth-finding process.” Saying that he believes the Special Court has an important place, Sesay offers his own version of the war.

While the trial is underway in Sierra Leone’s capital of Freetown, the Outreach Group of the Special Court visits rural communities to answer questions and show videotape of the proceedings. While some people feel the trial is positive and a step towards the country’s reconciliation, others are angry, believing some of the millions of dollars it cost to build the Special Court would have been better allocated to citizens to alleviate the immediate damage of the war.

During the trial, the prosecution has former RUF soldiers testify against Sesay, sometimes paying their expenses and relocating them for their protection. Prosecutor David Crane admits that testimony from former RUF soldiers is problematic but necessary, likening it to “dancing with the devil.”

With conviction looming, the defense lays out what it considers Sesay’s mitigating circumstances. When RUF leader Foday Sankoh was arrested and imprisoned at the end of the war, Sesay became the interim leader. Pressured by principals of neighboring West African countries to

disarm the RUF, he ended the civil war without further bloodshed – and without negotiating a deal for his own amnesty. The Special Court subsequently sentences Sesay to 52 years in prison.

Following his own trial and the conclusion of WAR DON DON, Sesay has been in the news again, testifying at The Hague (along with Naomi Campbell and Mia Farrow, among others) in the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor. In his testimony, Sesay continues to attempt to assert his voice as the Special Court writes a history of the Sierra Leone conflict.

Today, Sierra Leone is a peaceful nation, but after two successful democratic elections, it remains the third-poorest country in the world.

Rebecca Richman Cohen, who is a Harvard Law School graduate and has a background in human rights and criminal defense, was a legal intern for the defense team on another case in the Special Court of Sierra Leone during the trial of Issa Sesay. She says, “I hope WAR DON DON offers an insider’s view about the complex moral, political and legal questions that issue from rebuilding lawless and war-torn nations – and will inspire thoughtful debate about the future of international criminal justice.”

WAR DON DON is directed and produced by Rebecca Richman Cohen; produced and edited by Francisco Bello; executive produced by Jim Butterworth and David Menschel; co-producer, Daniel Chalfen; composer, Max Avery Lichtenstein.

Producers’ Bios

DIRECTOR / PRODUCER Rebecca Richman Cohen is an Emmy Award nominated filmmaker and a lecturer on law at Harvard Law School. She interned as an investigator at the Bronx Defenders and continued to do investigative work at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, working on a legal defense team for Alex Tamba Brima in the AFRC-accused case. Five months after leaving the Brima defense team, she returned to Sierra Leone to begin production on WAR DON DON, which profiles the trial of a leader of a separate warring faction. Between trips to Sierra Leone, she has been adjunct faculty at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and American University’s Human Rights Institute. Rebecca graduated from Brown University with a B.A. in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and with a Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School, where she now teaches. For her work on WAR DON DON she was awarded the the Cinereach Award for excellence in vital, artful storytelling and the Hugo Munsterberg Award for psychology of human nature in cinema. WAR DON DON also won the Special Jury Prize at the SXSW Film Festival and was nominated for two Emmy awards: Outstanding Continuing Coverage Of A News Story (Long Form) and Outstanding Editing. In 2010 Rebecca was profiled in Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces in Independent Film as an “up-and-comer poised to shape the next generation of independent film.”

PRODUCER / EDITOR Francisco Bello is an OSCAR® and EMMY Nominee. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art, and has worked in the post-production of films by Kevin Smith, Michael Moore, and George Butler among others. His recent editorial work includes *SUMMER SUN WINTER MOON* (ITVS), *NEITHER MEMORY NOR MAGIC* (MoMA Documentary

Fortnight), *BETTY LA FLACA* (HBO), and *JULIETA Y RAMON* (Showtime). He launched Ropa Vieja Films in 2007 with *SALIM BABA* (HBO, Canal+, EBS), which he shot and produced in Kolkata, India. *SALIM BABA* has screened in over 75 festivals worldwide including Sundance, Telluride, IDFA, Woodstock and Tribeca, and in 2008 was Nominated for an ACADEMY AWARD® for Best Short Documentary, followed by a News & Documentary Emmy Nomination in 2009. Most recently, Francisco produced and edited "War Don Don" which won the Special Jury Prize at the 2010 SXSW Film Festival, and for which he was awarded the first Karen Schmeer Award for Excellence in Documentary Editing. Francisco also recently completed his directorial debut commissioned by HBO Documentary Films, "The Spirit of Salsa" which premiered at the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival. He has been awarded fellowships from the PBS/WGBH Producers Academy, the NALIP Producers Academy, Tribeca All Access, and a grant from the Urban Arts Initiative.

LINE PRODUCER Abu-Bakarr Jalloh is a stringer for Associated Press Television News and a documentary filmmaker and producer based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. He has worked with ABC-TV, a private television company in Freetown, as Director of News and Current Affairs and has contributed to the publication of Salone Times Newspaper in Freetown. A number of his recent projects have appeared on Current Television and excerpts of his work were screened on "Unreported World" a British Foreign Affairs program on Channel 4 TV.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Jim Butterworth is the Founder and President of Naked Edge Films, a Producer and Director of *SEOUL TRAIN*, as well as a technology entrepreneur. Jim's first film, *SEOUL TRAIN*, has been in competition at more than 90 international film festivals (winning more than a dozen awards), was broadcast in 20 countries (including PBS in the U.S.), and has inspired countless grassroots and policy-level actions worldwide. In 2007, *SEOUL TRAIN* was bestowed the Alfred I. duPont – Columbia University Award, and was also runner-up for the National Journalism Award. Jim also founded and has led several successful companies, among them an early Internet company and a venture capital firm. He is also one of the pioneers in the development of streaming audio and video over the Internet, and holds 10 issued and numerous pending patents in this field. Jim holds a Bachelor of Industrial and Systems Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology and an MBA from the Amos Tuck School at Dartmouth College. He is an inductee into the Georgia Tech Academy of Outstanding Engineering Alumni and also the recipient of the Dartmouth College Social Justice Award for significant contribution to social justice.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER David Menschel is a criminal defense lawyer and a director of the Vital Projects Fund, a charitable foundation with an interest in human rights and criminal justice reform. Through the Vital Projects Fund, Menschel has helped to fund several documentary films that advance progressive messages, including: *No Impact Man* (2009) about a New York City family's year-long experiment in carbon neutral living; and the *Oath* (2010) Laura Poitras' intimate psychological portrait of a cab-driving Yemeni jihadist and his Guantanamo-imprisoned brother-in-law. Formerly, Menschel was an attorney and the Arthur Liman Fellow at the Innocence Project in New York City and the legal director of the Innocence Project of Florida in Tallahassee. He is the author of *Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery, 1784-1848*, published in the Yale Law Journal. Before attending law school, Menschel

taught American history to high school students. He received a B.A. from Princeton University ('93) and a J.D. from Yale Law School ('02).

CO-PRODUCER Daniel J. Chalfen is a Founder of and producer at Naked Edge Films.

Previously, Chalfen independently produced documentaries including the feature-length films *MEETING RESISTANCE*, *ENCOUNTER POINT*, *39 POUNDS OF LOVE*, and *PULLED FROM THE RUBBLE*, and the verite television series *HAPPY FRANCE* and *ORDINARY PEOPLE*. Chalfen's films have been shown in festivals across the globe, have been theatrically released and broadcast worldwide (including on Al Arabiyya, Arte, Canal Plus, CBC, HBO, and ZDF), have featured on some of the world's leading networks including ABC, Al Jazeera, CNN and PBS, and have received a multitude of awards and accolades. His films also have screened for United Nations, military and government audiences as well as for Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and for NGOs and on university campuses on six continents. Daniel is a founder of Cine-Peace Film Festival (LA), an Advisory Committee member of the Other Israel Film Festival (NY), and a full voting member of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.