

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 9, 2007

For more information or contact:

USA: Chandan Kaur
chandan@meiff.com
+971.50.813.2452

UAE: Hana Al-Hirsi
hana@meiff.com

+971.50.818.7518

FILM FINANCING CIRCLE ANNOUNCES PAUL HAGGIS TO TEACH MASTER WRITING CLASS AND ALSO REVEALS INCIRCLE PEARL GRANT FINALISTS

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The Film Financing Circle (FFC) is an integral program in the inaugural Middle East International Film Festival in Abu Dhabi and takes place from October 15 – 17, 2007 at the Emirates Palace. The FFC today announced two-time Academy Award Ò - winner Paul Haggis will teach a master writing class for 50 exceptionally talented filmmakers, that is sure to provide an engaging discussion about socially and politically astute filmmaking in the Middle East. Haggis' writing credits include Academy Award Ò Best Picture winners CRASH and MILLION DOLLAR BABY, as well as FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS, CASINO ROYALE and THE VALLEY OF ELAH, which will screen at the Closing Night Gala.

"This has been one of the most exciting and best kept secrets of the Film Financing Circle ," said Executive Director Nashwa Al-Ruwaini. "Paul Haggis' Master Class is a first step in Abu Dhabi's commitment to elevating the caliber of filmmaking talent in the Emirates and the region."

The FFC encompasses several extraordinary events guaranteed to optimize networking connections between international financiers and film executives. The objective is to create new filmmaking opportunities in the Middle East and establish Abu Dhabi as a filmmaking hub. During the FFC, top-level financiers and executives from local businesses as well as the international investment and entertainment arenas will collaborate and participate in a variety of unique programs.

The FFC also revealed the six short-listed applicants for its InCircle Pearl Grant. The Grant was created to expose emerging filmmakers to high-level industry decision makers and facilitate financing for emerging filmmakers from around the world.

"The Film Financing Circle recognizes that creative talent is one of the critical components to a film's financial success," explained Adrienne Briggs, FFC Director. "Paul represents our commitment to fostering these promising new filmmakers, and we're excited to give them an opportunity to explore their craft with one of the greatest screenwriters of our time."

In addition to the general conference program, the FFC will produce a unique pitch program. The InCircle Pearl is a competitive program designed to identify, develop and launch the career of the winning filmmaker. Throughout the three-day FFC event, six powerhouse InCircle Teams will create a marketing and finance strategy for six chosen projects. The filmmakers will then have the opportunity to pitch their project to a juried panel of industry professionals.

Here is an introduction to the six finalists and a synopsis of their project.

Fadel Al Muhari (UAE)

A native of Abu Dhabi and student of filmmaking at the American University of Sharjah, Al Muhari's films have screened regularly in the Emirates Film Competition since 2002 and garnered several awards including "Best Screenplay" for *Al Ghaith* in 2004. His latest film

Under Construction has been an official selection at several international film festivals.

Project: *A Corsair's Tale*

An epic adventure of pirates and revenge, chronicling the back-handed brutality of the East India Trading Company. Seen through the eyes of a young man as he journeys from victim to pirate and then from pirate to hero. He leads his tribe in battle across the waters of the Arabian Gulf in rebellion against the tyranny of English ships on his native waters.

Soman Chainani (USA)

Graduate of the Columbia University's renowned film program and recipient of the prestigious FMI Fellowship as well as the CINE Golden Eagle Prize for directing, Soman worked in postproduction and development for Mira Nair's company, Mirabai Films. His acclaimed short *Davy & Stu* has screened in over fifty festivals on five continents and been distributed in over 100 international territories.

Project: *Love Marriage*

A romantic comedy of dueling weddings that threaten to tear an India family apart in the suburbs of London as the son bucks tradition and marries for love at the same time the daughter's wedding is arranged with the son of the most powerful family in the community. *Love Marriage* was selected for the IFP market and short-listed for both the 2006 Sundance Director's Lab and Writer's Lab.

Rusudan Chkonia (REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA)

Born in Tbilisi, Georgia, Rusudan graduated in 2001 from Georgian State University of Theatre & Film with a degree in directing, and her thesis film *Children Without a Name* won several international awards. Her project *Keep Smiling* won the Focal-Swiss programme for filmmakers from the Caucasus as well as both the Talent Highlight Pitch award at The Berlinale Co-Production Market, and the best East-European project at the B2B Industrial Meetings in Belgrade. Rusudan also participated in The Résidence du Festival Cannes with her project.

Project: *Keep Smiling*

The tragic comedy of seven women, all mothers of large families, who battle each other for first prize in a 'Mother's Only' beauty contest for mothers in Tbilisi, Georgia. Cat fighting with a flagrant disregard for rules and using every means necessary, these desperate but noble contestants quickly discover the real battle isn't between them, but against the corrupt contest itself.

Max Gruber (AUSTRIA)

After earning a law degree and an MBA, Max Gruber left Austria for Los Angeles and earned a Masters Degree at USC's prestigious School of Cinematic Arts. He started in documentaries, moved to commercials and in 2006 had his directorial debut with *The Gate to Hell*, which won "Best Director" at the 31st Golden Chest International Film Festival.

Project: *We Kill What We Love*

A dramatic love story and psychological thriller set in Vienna that pits a young Turkish woman's search for her missing sister against her own cultural roots. Joining forces with a local detective, their investigation suddenly thrusts them across cultural and national boundaries as mounting evidence points to either an "honor killing" orchestrated by her own family, or a jealous lover's rage. The truth could tear her heart apart: love may give you wings, but it cannot cut your roots.

Kayvan Mashayekh (IRAN/USA)

Immigrating to Texas at age 11 from Iran, Mashayekh worked as a criminal defense attorney in Houston before turning to film. His first feature film, *The Keeper*, played in 14 US cities for nearly a year, as well as in Moscow, London, and Budapest. As part of the

distribution plan for the film, Mashayekh saw to it that a number of its screenings were for charity raising nearly \$200,000 for various Children's Cancer organizations around the world.

Project: *Batting for Palestine*

A charming drama following the struggle of a Jewish minor league baseball manager in Texas and a rock throwing Palestinian caring for his dying brother. Thrust together when a US physician in the West Bank sees an opportunity to help, the manager realizes the Palestinian's pitching arm could save his losing team as well.

John McFarlane (SCOTLAND)

Director of the UK cult hit series *Honky Sausages* as well as its up coming American adaptation on Showtime. McFarlane is one of Radical Media's top directors, having helmed hundreds of commercials and top music videos for high profile clients such as Sony and Jamiroquai.

Project: *Friends & Money*

An adventure comedy about a treasure hunt which takes a group of best friends from New York City halfway around the world after one of them, while archiving satellite images for Google Earth, discovers the hiding place for the loot from the biggest hold up in a hundred years.

The Middle East International Film Festival – Abu Dhabi (MEIFF) is a cultural event dedicated to bringing a diverse slate of international films and programs to the community and introducing filmmakers from around the world to the resources of the region. Presented by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH), MEIFF is committed to nurturing relationships and providing opportunities to those looking to invest in the future of film. In this regard, the Festival will launch the inaugural Film Financing Circle (FFC), which will become a significant annual conference on the subject of international co-productions. MEIFF debuts October 14-19, 2007 and FFC launches October 15-17, 2007. Abu Dhabi is a city unprecedented in its ability to develop and grow in response to the global marketplace.

For more information, please visit www.meiff.com

###