

Palestinian filmmaker briefly detained at U.S. airport on way to Oscars

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USPA News - Immigration officials at Los Angeles International Airport briefly detained the Palestinian filmmaker of the Oscar-nominated documentary "5 Broken Cameras" while he was on his way to a dinner preceding Sunday's Academy Awards. Emad Burnat said the incident happened on Tuesday evening when he, along with his wife and 8-year-old son, arrived at Los Angeles International Airport after a flight from Turkey.

He said he was questioned for more than an hour as immigration officials threatened to refuse him entry to the United States if he was unable to provide proof of his Oscar nomination. "They told me that if I couldn't prove the reason for my visit, my wife Soraya, my son Gibreel and I would be sent back to Turkey on the same day," Burnat, whose "5 Broken Cameras" is competing for an Oscar in the Best Documentary Feature category, said in a statement on Wednesday. The family was on its way to Beverly Hills to attend a dinner honoring the five nominated films for Best Documentary Feature. "5 Broken Cameras," which features a Palestinian farmer's non-violent resistance against the actions of the Israeli army, is the first Palestinian documentary ever nominated for an Oscar. Oscar-winning filmmaker Michael Moore, who is a governor of the Academy's Documentary Branch, said Burnat and his family had already spent nearly 6 hours at an Israeli checkpoint as they drove to the Jordanian city of Amman to catch a plane. "While we awaited Emad's arrival from the airport I received an urgent text from Emad, written to me from a holding pen at the Los Angeles International Airport," he said. Moore said immigration officials did not believe Burnat, a Palestinian olive farmer, when he told them he was on his way to Sunday's Academy Awards and events preceding it. "Apparently that was too much for Homeland Security to wrap its head around," said Moore, who immediately stepped in to help resolve the situation. After more than 40 minutes of questioning, Burnat said his son Gibreel asked him why they were still being held in the small detention room at the airport. "I simply told him the truth: 'Maybe we'll have to go back.' I could see his heart sink," the Palestinian filmmaker said in his statement. Moore said he immediately contacted Academy CEO Dawn Hudson and COO Ric Robertson after receiving Burnat's plea for help. "They got ahold of the Academy's attorney who is also partners with a top immigration attorney and they went to work on it," he said. "I called the State Department in D.C." "After being held for somewhere between one and two hours, with repeated suggestions that the U.S. may not let him into the country - saying that they may send him back home - the authorities relented and released Emad and his family," Moore said, describing Burnat as "fairly shaken and upset" when he arrived at the dinner. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials declined to comment on the incident but described the country as a "welcoming nation," adding that travelers may be referred for further inspection for a variety of reasons. These reasons include identity verification, intent of travel, and confirmation of admissibility. "Although this was an unpleasant experience, this is a daily occurrence for Palestinians, every single day, throughout the West Bank," Burnat said. "There are more than 500 Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks, and other barriers to movement across our land, and not a single one of us has been spared the experience that my family and I experienced [on Tuesday]. Ours was a very minor example of what my people face every day."

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