

# Women Filmmakers from Pakistan Honored in 2022 Women's Empowerment and Religious Freedom Film Competition

*Sponsored by Empower Women Media, the Competition Explores How Inclusivity*

*and Multi-Faith Living Empowers Women and Leads to Thriving Communities*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- [She Stood](#)

[Against Religious Extremism](#) by Zeenat Bibi (Peshawar, Pakistan) was awarded the grand prize in the 2022 Women's Empowerment and Religious Freedom

Film Competition. [Peace Promoters](#) by Khalida Niaz (Peshawar, Pakistan) took 1st runner-up, and [Without Fear](#) by Eleni Spiru (U.S.), was awarded 2nd runner-up.



She Stood Against Religious Extremism by Zeenat Bibi

The grand prize winner receives a \$3,000 cash prize, 1st runner-up \$1,500, and 2nd runner-up \$500.

She Stood Against Religious Extremism tells the true story of a young woman in a war-torn region of Pakistan who starts an initiative to counter religious extremism and sectarian violence by holding dialogue sessions with youth from different beliefs and religions.

In Peace Promoters, a young woman in Peshawar, Pakistan counters religious-based violence by building relationships among different faith influencers.

Without Fear captures the story of a Pakistani American woman and her struggles to escape oppression and fight for religious freedom.

The media projects submitted to the film competition came from thirty women who took part in Empower Women Media's Pakistan Media Training Fellowship. For six months, these talented Pakistani women learned about Freedom of Religion or Belief and received expert training on how to produce contextualized digital media to reach their communities and world class leaders.

“We were amazed to witness the tenacity and creativity of the Pakistani women filmmakers,” said Shirin Taber, Director of Empower Women Media. “They took risks to share their women’s empowerment and religious freedom stories. Their films have the potential to change lives and shift the culture at large. We need more women media advocates like them!”

In addition to the top three films, Hidden Identities: The Forgotten Women of Ceylon by Soraya Deen (Sri Lanka and U.S.) won the Global Religious Women’s Empowerment and Religious Freedom Award.

Two films won Inclusion Awards: A Thousand Reasons to Smile by Anita Inayat (Lahore, Pakistan) and A Helping Hand Across Faiths and Countries by Jamaima Afridi (Khyber Pakhtunkwa, Pakistan).

Two films also won Diversity Awards: A Story of a Cyclist from Skardu by Saira Zahid (Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan) and Gurdwara Siri Singh Saba, Quetta by Rani Wahidi (Quetta, Pakistan).

She Means Change, a social media campaign created by Ayesha Shaikh (Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan) won the Inclusion and Diversity Social Media Award.

Empower Women Media invited nine highly respected judges to review the short films, including Katrina Lantos Swett, president of the Lantos Foundation; Dr. Brian Grim of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, Ed Brown, Secretary General of Stefanus Alliance International, and other leading voices for religious freedom.

“Empower Women Media’s Religious Freedom Film Competition allows for a small glimpse into the phenomenal and tireless work that women are accomplishing in South Asia to ensure equality in regard to religious freedom and the practice of religious beliefs without persecution,” said judge, Dr. Karen Leslie Hernandez, Programme Officer in Partnerships and Interreligious Education, Religions for Peace International. “Behind and in front of the camera, this competition supports, ensures and empowers a vital platform for these important voices to be heard and it gives the viewer a rich and wonderful learning experience as well.”

Annie McKinney, Director of Communications and Operations for IRF Secretariat, said after judging the films: “What you all are doing is incredible and inspiring, and being a young woman in IRF myself, just to put it simply, thank you.”

The winning films will screen before civil society and faith leaders at the IRF Film Festival and Roundtable in Islamabad, Pakistan on June 19th. Selected films will also be showcased at the IRF Summit in Washington, DC, June 28-30.

This is the fifth annual Religious Freedom Film Competition sponsored by Empower Women Media in association with the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation.

For more information about the short films, female media producers, and the June 19th IRF Film Festival and Roundtable, contact the Empower Women Media Director, Shirin Taber, at [shirin@visualstory.org](mailto:shirin@visualstory.org) or [www.empowerwomen.media](http://www.empowerwomen.media). To watch the films, visit Empower Women Media YouTube channel.

Honorable Mentions: IRF Karachi Summary by Wagma Feroz (Khyber Pakhtunkwa, Pakistan), Together We Go Farther by Samantha Javed (Rawalpindi, Pakistan), Live What You Believe Screenings in Pakistan by Jamaima Afridi (Khyber Pakhtunkwa, Pakistan), and She Fills Her Color in the World by Summen Patras and Nargus Azhar (Lahore, Pakistan).

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