

# Documentary vs. draconian laws

Film director Line Halvorsen can't get past her latest documentary, *USA v. Al-Arian*, a movie about the Palestinian activist Sami Al-Arian, a university professor in Florida, who is imprisoned on terrorism charges.



Laila Al-Arian, one of Sami's daughters  
PHOTO: LINE HALVORSEN

**By Ola Flyum**

Halvorsen, originally from Trondheim, Norway, says she can't start new projects before she has done her uttermost to tell the world about what she says is a "kafkaesque" case against the Al-Arian family in Florida.

Since its first screening in January 2007 the documentary has been screened at more than 80 film festivals. In addition to earning favourable reviews, it has also won prizes at some of the film festivals. Halvorsen is frequently in touch with the Al-Arian family.

"I have several ideas, but they are on hold for now," she says.

We met Halvorsen in New York City where the documentary was shown at the film festival organized by Human Rights Watch. The film's photographer, Tone Andersen, also from Trondheim, and Sami's son, Abdullah, were also present at the showing. Both Halvorsen and Andersen has lived for extended periods of time in Israel and the Occupied Territories, where they made another documentary called *A Stone's Throw Away*, about young Palestinians resisting the occupation.

The documentary about Al-Arian's case was not set up for regular screening in movie theatres in the U.S., but it has been shown on numerous festivals. Human rights groups and church groups have also organized viewings. However, a movie theatre owner in Los Angeles refused to show it as he deemed it to "radical".

At the showing in New York most of the people in attendance stayed for a Q and A session with Halvorsen and Abdullah Al-Arian.

## **A political prisoner**

Sami Al-Arian is still in prison and his son Abdullah says his dad is a political prisoner. Al-Arian has been acquitted of the charges of terrorism, he has also served his sentence for the lesser charges. Still the Palestinian professor remains in prison.

To end the case, and for the sake of his family who intend to stay in the U.S., Sami Al-Arian came to an agreement with the authorities to leave the US. Al-Arian has lived in the country for 35 years.

The challenge is to find a country that is willing to let him stay. Even though he has served his sentence, Al-Arian will be in prison until this is solved.

"The Bush administration uses the case against Al-Arian to set a precedent in its fight