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## Oscars mull change to 'Palestine' movie tag amid outcry

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By Marc Lavine  
February 16, 2006

LOS ANGELES, Feb 16, 2006 (AFP) - Oscar chiefs are mulling whether to recategorise a disputed best foreign film nomination about suicide bombers as they come under intense fire for labelling the film as coming from "Palestine."

The movie, "Paradise Now," one of five contenders for the best foreign language film, has caused a firestorm in Israel and in US Jewish communities over both its unsettling subject matter and its country designation.

Officials of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts Sciences, which listed the movie as being from "Palestine" on its nominations list, confirmed they were considering a name change, possibly to "Palestinian Territories," to deflect the storm.

"We are thinking about what to call it, but no final decisions have been made yet," the Academy's communications director John Pavlik told AFP.

"There is some talk about referring it to the 'Palestinian Territories,' but as far as I know there has been no high level meeting about it yet," he said.

He also dismissed media reports claiming the film could be reclassified as Dutch as it was partly financed by Dutch investors as "out of the question" and "impossible."

In addition, Pavlik denied reports that the Academy had come under pressure from the Israeli government or Jewish groups to change the movie's designation, although he conceded that the word "Palestine" and the controversial subject matter had generated a wave of protest from individuals.

"I keep hearing about this official pressure, but we have not got any pressure from any government or any group," he said

Israel's Consulate General in Los Angeles said it had never approached the Academy in a bid to change the film's national designation.

"The Israeli government has not been in contact with the Academy on this issue," said Gilad Millo, consul for media and public affairs. "We have to focus on more important issues. It's fiction, it's just a movie," he said.

But a prominent US Jewish group, the American Jewish committee, said it objected to the name "Palestine" being used to describe the film since no such country was recognised by the international community.

"It is inaccurate to say that the film originated from Palestine," spokesman Kenneth Bandler told AFP. "It came from the Palestinian authority.

Hopefully those involved in the Academy will correct this," he added. The content of the movie, which tells the tale of two childhood friends who volunteer for a double suicide bombing and which won the Golden Globe for best foreign film, has also enraged some Israelis.

The movie, directed by director Hany Abu-Assad, is set mainly in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, but also in the coastal city of Tel Aviv, the intended target of the fictional attack.



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Set over a period of 48 hours, the story twists and turns as the director seeks to explore the strength of their motivation, their doubts and fears until the finale, when one goes ahead and the other backs out.

For many in Israel, the film is little more than a gratuitous attempt to glorify those behind the deaths of hundreds of Israelis.

Officials of the American Jewish Committee and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a leading Jewish lobby group based in Los Angeles, however said they had not seen the film and had no comment on its content.

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