



## Neda For A Free Iran

*Furthering Human Rights through Knowledge and Wisdom*

**Saadi (1184 - 1283/1291?)**

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other,  
having been created of one essence.  
When the calamity of time affects one limb,  
the other limbs cannot remain at rest.  
If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others,  
thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human.

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## I Am Neda, The Movie makes it to Cannes

I Am Neda The Movie has been short listed and made the [finalist list](#) at [Cannes Emerging Filmmaker Showcase](#) for screening at American Pavilion, We had a chance to have a short conversation with Nicole Kian Sadighi the Producer, Director and the Lead Actress



**NFAFI** :Nicole,Your movie has been short listed at the Cannes Film Festival for the section of the emerging Filmmakers. To what extent have you achieved your goal in making such a highly charged movie based on violation of Human Rights in Iran?

**Nicole** - I cannot begin to express my excitement and pride for this film. Of course we have only just begun the festival circuit, but since we wrapped production last autumn, we have been selected at 8 festivals so far and won 2 awards. This is a pretty good achievement for a low budget independent film. We have been official selections at The Montreal World Film Festival, The BeFilm Festival in New York, The Beverly Hills Film Festival, Free Speech Film Festival, ARPA International Film Festival, Los Angeles Movie Awards, where we won The Honorable Mention Award and more recently we won top Platinum Special Jury Award at the WorldFest Houston, which is famous for discovering filmmakers such as Spielberg and the Cohen Brothers.

This is extremely humbling and getting into the finalists at Cannes American Pavilion is awe inspiring and an honor whether we win or not, I feel like a winner already. But we will not stop at Cannes. I intend to take this to many more festivals and eventually the Oscars.

Receiving this tremendous news is a great sense of achievement for me as a first time director, writer, producer. But what all this really means is that these festivals believe in the message of the movie, and appreciate it as an artistic form of telling a story. They are moved by Neda's story as I have been. At the same time in amongst the celebrations, it is also a time to sit back and reflect and contemplate why I began walking the path to make this movie in the first place. A moment in history, which was engulfed by tragedy, an inspiring legacy that Neda left behind. Like the nameless man standing in front of the tanks in Tienanmen Square, or the little naked girl running away from the napalms during Vietnam, Neda is an iconic image forever engraved in our minds. Whether they are aware of it or not, these great festivals are giving a voice to the voiceless, for which I will be internally grateful because they believe in this movie as I do. They are not only giving this movie a platform but also something much greater than all of us. This is huge. It gives me a sense of warmth and hope. So in a sense I am already on the way to achieving what I set out to do. Which is to tell Neda's story to the world. But the journey has only just begun.

**NFAFI**:The movie is about the life of an Iranian woman called Neda, and the title of your film means that we all are her voice. Now Neda is regarded as a symbol of resistance in civic movement in Iran. Why have you decided to recall the events following the Iranian rigged presidential elections more than two years ago?

**Nicole:** - To me Neda was one of the most courageous individuals in Iran. When the world watched with bated breath as the streets of Tehran erupted in 2009, those of us living outside of Iran, were glued to our television and computer screens, multi-tasking every news that came out through the social media and leading news outlets such as the BBC, CNN. And of course we saw this young woman Neda, one minute innocently standing there, and then the next she was gone right before our eyes. We usually see casualties in the aftermath of the war and turmoil but never during, not as close up as this. It was so shocking. It was the most widely televised close-up killing in history. There are no words to describe it. It was too painful. You go through an array of emotions. She didn't deserve it. I wanted to know more about this girl called Neda and I wanted to share her story with the world. What inspired her, what were her beliefs, her likes, dislikes, what she was like in private amongst her loved ones, what was her driving force? So I started to research her and put pen to paper and wrote her story through my eyes, with the best honesty and integrity. I say through my eyes...but this film is really through her eyes. This film, as I feel, is Neda's calling card. She is my inspiration and through this process has become so dear to my heart. It's difficult not to get involved in someone's story whilst researching it. She saw the world with such hope and romance and beauty despite the depressing restraints of the country she lived in. Wow, what a woman! I've lived outside of Iran all my life, but it doesn't matter who you are, Iranian or otherwise, Neda's story translates all language barriers. It's a human story. And that is exactly what I have hoped to achieve with my movie 'I Am Neda'. The world must never forget her story and that of all the Neda's of the world.

**NFAFI:** Ms. sadighi, in addition to writing and directing, you played the role of Neda, my question is: What do you regard as cultural and visual common grounds between yourself and Neda's who belonged to a different generation and culture?

**Nicole:-** Although Neda was a world apart from me, she is no different from anyone of us. Of course I am Persian by blood and my upbringing has been filled with Persian traditions and historical lessons of my roots and my homeland, but at the end of the day we are all Neda, regardless of language, gender, age, political, social or religious beliefs. Neda was a human being longing for the same things in life as anyone else. She had ambitions, goals and dreams. Like many of us she was a hopeless romantic and loved the idea of being in love. She loved singing and music, reading, the arts. She wanted to travel the world and explore new adventures. Isn't that what we all want? How is she different from anyone else? How are any of the Neda's of the world any different from any of us? She was an ordinary person living in extraordinary times. There's nothing unusual about an Iranian person living in Iran that is any different from the rest of the world, except for the tragic circumstances they live in. But they have the same desires as we do. I hope that an audience member can see that no matter what language we speak, Neda could be any one of us, your sister or brother, your girlfriend or boyfriend, wife or husband, daughter or son, your best friend or you. Why should someone be killed for their basic desire for freedom and happiness? We can all identify with her on some level. Since a young child she hated injustice. She was driven by her righteous sense to stand up for what she believed. That's nothing new to mankind. It really wasn't so difficult to make a connection. But it's all too easy for the world to forget her legacy.

**NFAFI:** In this short film, you have mainly paid attention to the social and political aspects of Neda's characteristics. Why the inner aspects of her private life as well as her interests in poetry and music have been ignored?

**Nicole:** – When I first set out to make this movie, the first step was to research her story and research it well. If I wasn't sure about something in her life, or could not back it up then I felt it had no place in my movie. After all this was a real person, not a fictional character from one's imagination. I wanted to honor and respect the process of making this film and of course her legacy. I realized I was not only documenting history but also retelling it, which is a huge responsibility and I wanted to do it with the honor and respect that it deserves. At the same time, you have to remember that this is a short 20 minute movie. One cannot just put everything about a person's life into 20 minutes. If I had the resources, I would have made this into a feature length film. I had to work with what I had. However even in a 20 minute movie I have deliberately placed small details of Neda's personality into the movie. For example one of the books she loved to read was Bronte's Wuthering Heights. But she had the Farsi version with the Farsi book cover. I searched high and low for this particular book cover in Farsi, (because the film is in Farsi with English subtitles) and in my film there is a scene with her reading Wuthering Heights. So I felt it was important to have these little details that represented her colorful character. From my understanding Neda was not such a political person in as much as she truly loathed social injustice. She was just an ordinary young Iranian woman, like any other, who was frustrated with the conditions her country was in. It was very important to make this film through her eyes. This is about her, not what the rest of us think about the situation in Iran. The world only knew of this young woman lying on the ground. But she was once an amazing person with ideals and goals and she was so strong, driven and tenacious. Such an inspiration. I wanted to bring a human factor to this tragic image that we see of her. In the process I also made a vow to uphold Neda's legacy and memory. Neda has become a symbol of all the Neda's of the world. We mustn't forget any of them. In this amazing technological age of Twitter and Facebook, we cannot hide from the truth anymore. There is a reason that these innocent people across the other side of the world are filming what's really happening on the ground with their camera phones. They want us to take notice and listen...we are listening.

**NFAFI:** If we may ask, To what extent do you agree with the non violent civil rights movement in Iran?

**Nicole:** - Throughout history all these wars have put deep wounds on human soul. Bloodshed begets bloodshed. It's time now that the people should consider non-violent civil disobedience movement to achieve their goals. From Nazi occupied Denmark in 1933, to Ghandi's Salt March, Martin Luther King's civil rights movement, Apartheid in Africa, Poland, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, Chile, El Salvador, one could fill pages...



### About Nicole kian sadighi

Nicole, the daughter of two prominent Iranian journalists, was born in Tehran, Iran until her parents were assigned to the United Kingdom as London correspondents when she was just two years old.

From early years she always wanted to be an actress. That is why she attended Kingston University, and received her BA in Fine Arts with Hons. Then she did a three-year performing arts academy at Brooklands College.

She started her film career as a volunteer PA for film and television production companies. She quickly gained a positive reputation as an upbeat, prepared to go the extra mile. Soon production companies took notice and Nicole found herself being headhunted. During this time she accumulated the experience she needed to follow her passion in the movie industry as an actress.

With a good repertoire of plays and independent films, she later moved to Los Angeles, landing a lead role in the independent short "When the Lights go Down" and more recently a pilot "S.O.S I'm a Woman".

Nicole is keenly committed to exposing human rights violations across the globe and is often approached as a keynote spokesperson on behalf of numerous non-profit human rights and nongovernmental organizations. She not only has an artistic flair as a creative writer but has been a freelance writer for many leading publications and newspapers, for a number of years.

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