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Egypt filmmaker says word 'Jew' still a source of 'paranoia'



Al Arabiya, EMAN EL-SHENAWI

The word "Jew" when said in Egypt still causes paranoia, said Egyptian film director Amir Ramses, speaking after the ban on his film "Jews of Egypt" was lifted this week.

Venting his fury at Egypt's national security for barring the film earlier this month, Ramses told Al Arabiya English on Saturday of his ironic journey towards obtaining his permit.

"Whenever anything is mentioned about an Egyptian Jew, (Egypt's) national security has to get involved," Ramses said, adding that his production had initially attempted to break such ideologies through exploring the life of Egypt's Jewish community before the second Arab-Israeli war in 1956.

"For average Egyptian, there is no differentiation between the words 'Jew,' 'Israeli' and 'Zionist.' This is an offensive perspective in Egypt, which is just as offensive as considering Muslim being responsible for the Taliban's actions.

"Egyptian Jews have as much right to be discussed as anyone else ...they have as much right to live in Egypt," Ramses said.

He added that the documentary seeks to "correct this image about Judaism," and explore how thousands of "Jews, Christians, Muslims, even Italians and Greeks lived together without phobias."

Although the film had been shown in festivals abroad, and had already retrieved a permit from Egypt's national

bureau of censorship, officials had reportedly banned the film over fears that the title might arouse anger in an already volatile Egypt.

Religious tensions between the ruling Muslim Brotherhood and oppositional parties have been brewing in recent months with a stark increase in civil disobedience and violent protests against President Mohamed Mursi.

"There was no clear reason why the film was banned. It was not a legal act; it is not the censorship bureau's right to cooperate with national security. This was all done behind the curtain," Ramses said.

On Friday, Ramses wrote on Twitter: "Jews of Egypt on the 27th of March in movie theatres ...We won the war against national security...we got the permit."

Despite a 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Egypt continues to have fidgety relations with the country, particularly with recent comments from Brotherhood members which show that anti-Israeli sentiments run still deep.

In December, deputy leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party Essam el-Erian was criticized by conservatives and liberals alike when he stated that he would welcome the return of Egyptian Jews who left for Israel after the 1956 Arab-Israeli war.

"Jews of Egypt," which has been previously selected by the European film festival and the Arab camera film festival in winter of 2012, will now premier in Egypt on March 27.