

Documentary of bid to uncover UN secretary-general's Nazi past wins film prize

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Kurt Waldheim was Austria's foreign minister and president, as well as UN Secretary General



Kurt Waldheim speaking to reporters in 1981, towards the end of his second term as UN Secretary General (Photo: Getty Images)

A film about the 1986 campaign to uncover the Nazi-era past of Austrian politician Kurt Waldheim has won a major prize [at the Berlinale International Film Festival](#).

Austrian Jewish filmmaker Ruth Beckermann's documentary, *The Waldheim Waltz*, had its world premiere this week in Berlin, where it received the €50,000 [£44,070] Glashütte Original Documentary Award.

Ms Beckermann used historical footage, including some she took, to examine the question of whether Waldheim lied about his past in order to boost his political career.

Waldheim served as Austrian foreign minister before becoming secretary-general of the United Nations in 1972.

He was later elected President of Austria for a single term between 1986 and 1992.

Though no crimes of violence were pinned on Kurt Waldheim, it was roundly accepted by the time he died in 2007 that he had lied about his membership of Nazi organizations as a young man.

It also emerged he had been a member of the Wehrmacht and had, according to a *New York Times* obituary, put his “signature on documents linked to massacres and deportations” of Yugoslav partisans and Greek Jews.

Ms Beckermann’s documentary digs up an old story and makes it fresh by asking whether Austria has gone far enough, 32 years later, in confronting its own role in Nazi war crimes.

The documentary includes press conferences with heads of the World Jewish Congress, who went all out to uncover the truth about Waldheim, and defensive interviews with Waldheim both in English and German.



Austrian director Ruth Beckermann poses with her Glasshuetten Original documentary film award (Photo: Getty Images)

It also includes footage of protests in Austria, including verbal confrontations between supporters and detractors that reveal the underbelly of persistent anti-Semitism.

Jewish film festivals around the world have reportedly expressed interest in booking the film following this year’s Berlinale, which closed on Sunday.

Also honoured at the Berlinale festival was Katriel Schory, director of the Israel Film Fund since 1999. He was recognized with the “Berlinale Camera” award on February 20 for his lifetime achievements in promoting and supporting film by Israelis of all

backgrounds and persuasions.

Other films with Israeli or Jewish themes shown at this year's Berlinale included:

- *Para Aduma* (Red Cow), by Israeli director Tsivia Barkai Yacov, a film in the youth category about the coming of age of a teenage girl in a settlement town;
- *Sleeping Bears*, by Israeli director Keren Margalit, about a woman whose uncomfortable secrets begin to come out after her psychotherapist dies in an accident;
- *The Disappeared*, a German-Israeli documentary by Adam Kaplan and Gilad Baram, about an IDF film that was never released about soldier suicides;
- Director José Padilha's dramatization of the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris, entitled *7 Days in Entebbe*; and
- *The Interpreter*, a Czech-Austrian coproduction directed by Martin Šulík, which explores an encounter between a fictional elderly Jewish survivor and the son of the SS officer who had killed his parents.