

Dubai's City of Hope

Supporting companies:
Credo Investments FZE

Filmquip Media

Kodak Cinelabs Dubai

Déjà Vu

Creative Kingdom

Pro Action Media

A television commercial about a shelter for women in difficulty

Seven years ago, American-born Sharla Musaibih first opened the doors of her newly-created shelter in Dubai to violated women and children with no one to turn to and nowhere to go. Since then, she has offered aid, sustenance and support to hundreds of victims of trafficking and abusive relationships. Now known as the City of Hope, it is the first and only privately-run shelter in the entire Gulf region.

When freelance director Sofia De Fay met Sharla, she was instantly touched by her pioneering work and decided to raise awareness of her charitable cause. She knew a short commercial would gain support for the shelter and hope for the victims, but instead she determined to produce an all-encompassing corporate and social responsibility television commercial on trafficking and abuse in the Middle East; a controversial issue demanding utmost sensitivity.

Undeterred by prevailing attitudes and a city with high inflation, De Fay

brought freelance producer Reim El Houni on board and together they sought help to fund the groundbreaking charity commercial. Sofia's concept was to make viewers understand, in an abstract way, what it feels like to be a victim, without showing women being beaten or hurt. Instead, they used chilling and thought-provoking images of lights shattering, a knife cutting through glass and darkness, and drowning to suggest violence, alienation and destruction.

Generosity

They received a generous donation from Dubai-based Credo Investments FZE which funded the crew, who had agreed to work on half rates. In addition, Filmquip Media provided \$9,500-worth of cameras and lighting equipment, Kodak Cinelabs Dubai donated 16mm film stock, processing, telecine transfer and a final grade. Déjà Vu edited the film and Creative Kingdom undertook the audio track

and sound design, both companies waiving charges.

Others that helped to bring the commercial together include Pro Action Media, Scorpion Productions and art director Giovanni Ravagnani, who was briefed to deliver three set-ups. The first is a seedy hotel room with deep grey marble-textured walls and tattered furniture to depict a sense of degraded beauty and decay and reflect the mind and soul of a young girl who has lost her innocence. The second is a middle-class, middle-aged woman's bedroom which appears opulent, but jewels and make-up belie the brutal violation she has suffered. The third is a night-time underwater sequence of a girl in a layered wedding dress sinking to the bottom of a deep pool with streams of white lace and silk flowing from her. After fear caused three girls to decline the terrifying task, assistant art director Ashley Borders came to the rescue. Slipping into the wedding dress, with a weight belt around her waist and another in her hand, she bravely endured the cold water.

On set, director of photography Richard Latham (*The Kingdom*) chose a 1000W tungsten key light, a 650W back light and a Kino Flo, plus an 8.12

filter for a slightly warm look.

For the underwater sequence he put a 20 x 20 black-out in the water at the back end of the shot and sunk the ARRIFLEX 16SR and 12mm lens into the pool in a Filmquip Media splash housing, using a 1.4k HMI to create a shaft of light. "I filmed with KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 at 150 fps at a minimum depth of 15 feet to give the shot some duration," Latham says.

"So many people from the industry came together to offer talent, time and resources; it was amazing to be part of such commitment to a cause" states El Houni, who hopes the commercial's startling images will have a strong impact on viewers. "Richard Lawton, Manager for Kodak El, Middle East & Africa assisted us a great deal. We would not have been able to complete the project without Kodak's support and hope to work with them on more exciting projects in the future."

The *City of Hope* television commercial has been included on DVD releases by Front Row Filmed Entertainment and will be hitting cinemas within the UAE soon.

1 Model Razia and her son Safiwan in a scene from the *City of Hope* commercial.



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