

Terror attack at "Vessel" screening in Sweden



5 hours ago by [Adam Benzine](#)



Three masked men stormed a screening of SXSW-winning abortion documentary *Vessel*

(pictured) in Sweden on Sunday (December 7), setting off a smoke bomb that sent audience members fleeing in panic.

The [SXSW award-winning documentary](#), which focuses on activist Rebecca Gomperts and her pro-choice organization Women on Waves, was being screened at the Abortion Rights Festival in Stockholm – an event jointly hosted by Swedish organization RFSU (the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education) and its magazine *Ottar*.

Josefin Morge, an RFSU spokesperson, told *realscreen* that late afternoon on Sunday, during the final screening of the film, three masked men stormed the building, opening the door to the theater and throwing in a smoke bomb, which exploded.

“The smoke was thick and orange, and it was very difficult for the people inside to breathe,” she said. “They shut the door, and of course people inside panicked and were trying to go out – as soon as they could get out they were fine.”

Police, ambulances and firefighters were called to the scene. Morge said that while audience members were distressed, no-one was physically hurt, although one young girl who had difficulty breathing was taken to hospital for observation, and was released shortly afterwards.

“The police said this was a politically motivated attack,” she said, adding that authorities are continuing to investigate the incident. Morge also said that, since the whole festival was focused around abortion rights, the RFSU was assuming the attack to be the work of pro-life protesters.

The documentary’s American director, Diana Whitten (pictured, right), was not present at the screening, but expressed anger and sadness when contacted by phone by *realscreen*.

“It is terribly upsetting to me as a filmmaker, and as an activist and a person,” Whitten said. “I

can't imagine watching a movie one moment and suddenly be gasping for air. I'm very relieved everyone was okay.

"I also can't imagine having to resort to violence to express

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movement often relies on violence; this is global – even in unexpected places like Sweden, where abortion has been legal for 40 years. Our recourse is to resist it and not be intimidated.

"I'm encouraged by the support of the film community here and in Sweden," she added.

In response to the incident, the Gothenburg Film Festival – which takes place in January and is one of Sweden's largest film festivals – announced that it would be adding the film to next month's festival line-up.

The festival's artistic director, Jonas Holmberg, said in a statement that the incident was "an attack against democracy, freedom of speech, and against the function of film festivals as places for the free exchange of ideas," adding that "violence must never prevail over a film's freedom."

The incident is not the first to surround the documentary. At a *Vessel* screening during Hot Docs in Toronto – attended by *realscreen* – a woman was left with a bleeding head wound after being struck in the head by another woman's cell phone.

However, the fight was unrelated to politics – the two audience members clashed after one refused to stop using her phone during the screening.

Check out realscreen's profile of Vessel director Diana Whitten from March, prior to the film's double awards victory at SXSW, [here](#).



Tags: [abortion](#), [Diana Whitten](#), [Gothenburg Film Festival](#), [Jonas Holmberg](#), [Josefin Morge](#), [RFSU](#), [SXSW](#), [Vessel](#)