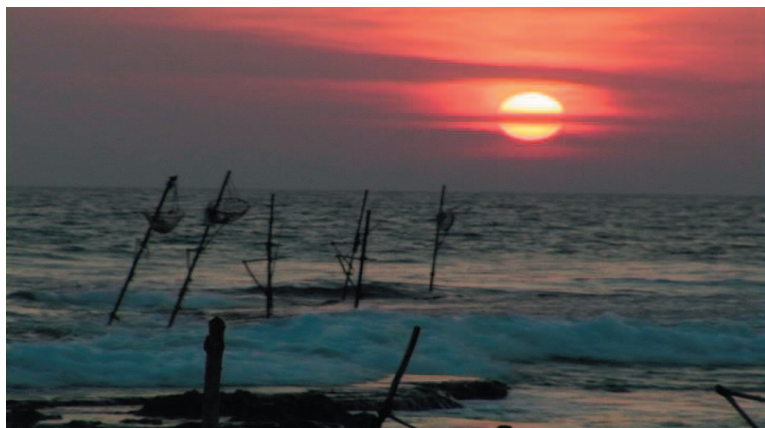


# cinematical

## FILM REVIEW : FROM DUST



WRITTEN BY FILM CRITIC CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL  
AT TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL 2006

What if you wanted to help out the victims of the most catastrophic disaster ... but were not allowed to?

Dhruv Dhawan's *From Dust* is the kind of inspiring documentary that typically has festival viewers pulling out their checkbooks at the end of a screening, but unfortunately its subjects are incapable of receiving charitable donations or any other sort of assistance. Trapped in the subsequent extensions of an already unbelievable tragedy, Sri Lanka's survivors of the 2004 tsunami are now also the victims of bureaucracy and greed.

Immediately following the tsunami, the Sri Lankan government issued a ban on the rebuilding of homes within 100 meters of the ocean. To ensure this mandate was followed, it spread rumors and issued false warnings to the media about more tsunamis being on the way. The government also forced the U.S. Army and relief organizations to follow the new rule, and even demolished any houses that were constructed or repaired if they were in violation. Meanwhile, citizens questioned the logic of such an edict since the tsunami had actually touched land nearly ten times past the distance of the buffer zone.

*From Dust* presents a destroyed fishing village and a coastal city in ruins and follows a number of men dealing with their government's impositions. These men include fishermen who require a home nearer to the ocean, and also members of a now tent-dwelling community that waits and waits to be issued new land in order to relocate. A volunteer from Australia, who comes with conspiracy theories about the influence of an opportunistic tourism industry, is on hand to represent the hopelessness of international aid in the situation.

*From Dust* is admirable in its lack of self-important involvement. While serving as a record of disappointing response and heart-breaking politics, its depiction of the events is oftentimes respectfully candid, even when directly conversational and confrontational. Clearly the film is at the side of and in support of the people, but it does welcome the arguments of government spokespeople without any blatant dissent.

In these days where it feels like the media's a blur of one-disaster-after-another, the boundless relevance of Dhawan's film is tremendous. The sad truth of its examinations is difficult to digest and could supplement the discouragement felt in the aftermaths of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, to name only the most media-conscious debacles. Yet, as distressing as the picture can be, it is also a powerfully moving look at the enduring victim. The people in *From Dust* are not shown as simply downtrodden and despondent. They retain an inspiring amount of joy and determination.

*From Dust* is the product of honest, dependable non-fiction filmmaking, emphasizing the document in documentary cinema, a genre that too often recently can become an advertisement for issues of the world, whether self-serving or selfless in nature, rather than as objective observation. Despite its appearance as a depiction of a lost cause, however, *From Dust* does work on a level of promoting causative response, as it shows the importance of information in absence of or in addition to action.

<http://www.cinematical.com/2006/04/12/tribeca-review-from-dust/>

PRESS