

= The Whistleblower =

The Whistleblower is a 2010 biographical crime drama film directed by Larysa Kondracki and starring Rachel Weisz . Kondracki and Eilis Kirwan wrote the screenplay , which was inspired by the story of Kathryn Bolkovac , a Nebraska police officer who was recruited as a United Nations peacekeeper for DynCorp International in post @-@ war Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1999 . While there , she discovered a sex trafficking ring serving (and facilitated by) DynCorp employees , with the UN 's SFOR peacekeeping force turning a blind eye . Bolkovac was fired and forced out of the country after attempting to shut down the ring . She took the story to BBC News in England and won a wrongful @-@ dismissal lawsuit against DynCorp .

Kondracki wanted her debut film to concern human trafficking , and she encountered Bolkovac 's story in college . She and Kirwan struggled to obtain financial support for the project . Eight years after Kondracki decided to produce the film , she secured funding and cast Weisz in the lead role . The Whistleblower ? a co @-@ production of Canada , Germany , and the United States ? was filmed in Romania from October to December 2009 .

The Whistleblower premiered on September 13 , 2010 , at the Toronto International Film Festival , and Samuel Goldwyn Films distributed the film in theaters in the United States . The film was advertised as a fictionalization of events occurring during the late 1990s . Kondracki said that the facts are broadly accurate but some details were omitted for the film ; for example , a three @-@ week " breaking @-@ in " period for trafficking victims was not shown . The film received mixed reviews . The performances by Weisz and her co @-@ stars were praised , but the intense violence depicted in several scenes was debated by critics , with some calling it exploitative . Kondracki and Weisz responded that what happened in Bosnia had been toned down for the film . The Whistleblower received several awards and nominations , including three nominations at the 2012 Genie Awards . UN Secretary @-@ General Ban Ki @-@ moon hosted a screening of the film and promised action would be taken to prevent further instances of human trafficking . The Guardian reported that other UN officials attempted to downplay the events depicted and that initiatives against trafficking in Bosnia were aborted .

= = Plot = =

Kathryn Bolkovac is a police officer from Lincoln , Nebraska , who accepts an offer to work with the United Nations International Police in post @-@ war Bosnia and Herzegovina for a UK company , Democra Security (a pseudonym for DynCorp International) . After successfully advocating for a Muslim woman who experienced domestic abuse , Kathryn is appointed head of the department of gender affairs .

Raya , a young Ukrainian woman , and her friend Luba are sold to a Bosnian sex @-@ trafficking ring by a relative . Raya escapes with Irka , another girl forced into prostitution , and they are sent to a women 's shelter for victims of human trafficking . While investigating their case , Kathryn uncovers a large @-@ scale sexual slavery ring utilized by international personnel (including Americans) . She persuades Raya and Irka to testify against their traffickers in court , guaranteeing their safety ; however , an indifferent UN official drops Irka at the border between Bosnia and Serbia when she cannot produce a passport . A corrupt peacekeeper tips off the traffickers , and Raya is recaptured and tortured . Although Kathryn rescues Irka from the woods , the latter is too afraid to proceed with the trial .

When she brings the scandal to the attention of the UN , Kathryn discovers that it has been covered up to protect lucrative defense and security contracts . However , she finds allies in her investigation : Madeleine Rees , head of the Human Rights Commission , and internal @-@ affairs specialist Peter Ward . When one of the girls found dead , Kathryn sends an email to fifty senior mission personnel detailing her findings ; she is then fired from her job . She and Ward acquire evidence of an official admitting the scandal before she is forced to leave the country , and she brings it to the BBC News . The final credits note that after Kathryn 's departure , a number of peacekeepers were sent home (although none faced criminal charges because of immunity laws) , and the U.S.

continues doing business with private contractors such as Democra Security (including billion @-@ dollar contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan) .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

The Whistleblower is based on the experiences of Kathryn Bolkovac , an American police officer who in 1999 was assigned to serve as a peacekeeper with the United Nations in post @-@ war Bosnia . While there , she reportedly discovered a sex @-@ trafficking ring which served and was facilitated by other peacekeepers . Bolkovac was fired after trying to investigate the ring , but she later won a wrongful @-@ dismissal lawsuit .

Director Larysa Kondracki and co @-@ screenwriter Eilis Kirwan learned of Bolkovac 's story while attending Columbia University , eight years before the film 's production . Kondracki subsequently devoted significant time to research human trafficking and the sex trade . After Bolkovac sold her the film rights for \$ 100 , she resolved to adapt the story for the screen . Financing for the project was initially difficult to secure , although the situation improved after Rachel Weisz was cast as Bolkovac . " I was young and naïve , " Kondracki said of her initial attempts to secure funding . " I thought : ' Of course they 're going to make my film . It 's brilliant ! ' "

The Whistleblower was described as a " fictionalized dramatic presentation " of a late @-@ 1990s scandal . The producers based it on Bolkovac 's experiences , rather than on her memoir . Vanessa Redgrave played Madeleine Rees , a UN human @-@ rights official (" one of the film 's few heroic characters ") who helps Bolkovac uncover the sex trade . Raya (Roxana Condurache) and Luba (Paula Schramm) , two Ukrainian young women who are trafficked into Bosnia , are the primary representations of the trafficking victims encountered by Bolkovac . Neither is based on a particular person ; they are composites of young women forced to work in Bosnian brothels . Kondracki 's younger sister , Rayisa , also played a trafficking victim . For legal reasons the pseudonym " Democra Security " was used for DynCorp International , the organization whose employees reportedly sexually enslaved the women .

Although the producers kept the film factual , they debated how much to include . Details on the bureaucracy were removed . Kondracki said , " It was too much information and , frankly , people were bored . " Another concern was how much violence against the sex @-@ trafficking victims should be depicted in the film . Kondracki chose to bluntly portray the inhumane treatment of the young women , which she described as accurate representations of what happened . This included a graphic scene , in which Raya is raped with a lead pipe after her escape and recapture . Weisz thought the reality had been toned down , " In real life there were girls doing this as young as 8 years old . " Kondracki agreed , saying that she had lightened the events depicted out of fear that viewers would " tune it out " :

We show what is just about permissible to show . We couldn 't possibly include the three @-@ week desensitisation period , when they burn the girls in particular places . We couldn 't really capture the hopelessness of life these women are subjected to .

Kondracki said that her goal for The Whistleblower was " information and exposure " on human trafficking . She said , " No one is putting pressure on governments to stop it , and there is no accountability . It 's laziness . "

= = = Filming = = =

The Whistleblower is a Canadian ? German co @-@ production . Weisz received the script from producer Amy Kaufman in 2007 . Since she was pregnant with her son at the time , she initially

turned down the offer . She said the story haunted her , and she later contacted Kaufman to ask if the project was still available . She signed on in August 2009 , and shooting began in October 2009 .

Bolkovac visited the set in Bucharest , Romania , where most of the movie was filmed . Weisz said that she made a point to spend " every waking moment " with her to accurately portray her . Weisz and Bolkovac are dissimilar in appearance : the former is dark @-@ haired and slight , and the latter is " blond and much more voluptuous " and " much taller " . As a result , the actress focused on emulating Bolkovac 's accent and determination . Bolkovac later said she commended the choice to portray her and appreciated Weisz 's efforts to be accurate .

Filming took around six weeks , relatively short for a thriller ; Weisz said most take about three months to complete . Producers used hand @-@ held cameras and had a lower budget than usual for the genre . Kondracki said filming in Eastern Europe was crucial , " In a story such as this , it 's more about what you don 't see , so you need to create that world . " The Carpathian Mountains in Romania served as the backdrop for the war @-@ ravaged Sarajevo of the late 1990s . Scenes set in UN buildings were filmed in Toronto . Most outdoor scenes are set at night ; daytime shots often appear bleak , gray and overcast . This , coupled with a grainy texture , helped create a documentary feel .

Weisz had to separate herself emotionally from the atrocities depicted in the film . " It 's something you learn , " she said . " It 's true between ' action ' and ' cut , ' and after ' cut ' it 's just not true anymore . " Bolkovac echoed Weisz 's sentiments , adding that distancing oneself emotionally is a necessity when working on a police force . However , the producers wanted the audience to be affected by scenes depicting brutal treatment of the women forced into prostitution , and the character of Raya was created to give a human face to the victims . Much of the rape scene was cut after its brutality caused a viewer to faint during the film 's first screening in Toronto . Weisz responded :

I completely understand . It would be just too harrowing for people to watch . What actually happened was so much worse . I mean the stories I could tell you from the first person who encountered these young women . That was the " light " version if you can believe that . But it isn 't a documentary , you don 't want to destroy people . You just want to illuminate something that actually happened that was a hundred times worse .

= = Themes = =

The Whistleblower focuses on sexual slavery , human trafficking , and corruption . Kondracki wanted her first project to concern sex trafficking but was unsure how to create a moving , original plot . Her mother was born in Ukraine , and she was aware of what she described as the country 's " epidemic " of trafficking . Victor Malarek 's book *The Natashas* inspired her to produce a film on the subject . She said of her initiative being a challenge , " No one wants to watch a film of an enslaved girl being raped for two hours . " Bolkovac 's experiences gave Kondracki a framework for the film and added the themes of corruption and wide @-@ scale cover @-@ ups . Film critic Rex Reed said that the abuse of power featured prominently in *The Whistleblower* ; a number of government officials participate in the sex trade or turn a blind eye to it (including peacekeepers , UN members and mercenaries) . Wallace Baine of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* wrote that these aspects ' portrayal made the movie " slippery and true @-@ to @-@ life " . She said , " There are clear and vivid monsters in this film , but there are also those existing in the shades @-@ of @-@ gray middle , nice @-@ enough guys tolerating crimes of unspeakable barbarity . " Justice , another prominent theme , does not materialize by the end . The sex trafficking victim Raya is killed , and none of the peacekeepers who participated in the trafficking are prosecuted (although several are sent home) . According to Baine , viewers are left with the impression that " the worst violence in Bolkovac 's story was the violence done to justice " .

Bolkovac is portrayed as imperfect ? a " noble but screwed up " individual . In the film (which roughly mirrors her real life) , her personal life is in disarray . She has lost custody of her children to her ex @-@ husband and goes to Bosnia to earn money to move closer to them . While there , she

has an affair with a fellow peacekeeper . Kondracki wanted to promote the idea of an average protagonist who acted against injustice while her peers looked the other way . Her flaws are offset by her determination to fight the sex trade , and reviewers found these aspects instrumental in making her a three @-@ dimensional character .

Weisz compared Bolkovac 's story of " one lone woman fighting injustice " to that of David and Goliath , her favorite film genre . In the film , as in real life , Bolkovac begins by investigating a case of a kidnapped girl . As the story unfolds , she discovers a wide @-@ ranging web of corruption and faces growing obstacles . The sex trade is facilitated by a large , influential organization . When she tries to report her findings to the UN and local officials , she receives threats and is " shunned by coworkers and thwarted by higher @-@ ups " . Weisz explained that she liked the idea of an ordinary person doing something extraordinary . She said , " I love that kind of thriller , the ordinary person who , because of their character , it 's their character that leads them . "

= = Release = =

The Whistleblower premiered on September 13 , 2010 , at the 2010 Toronto Film Festival . Screenings were also held at film festivals in North America , including the 2011 Human Rights Watch Film Festival in New York .

A screening was held for The Whistleblower in Bosnia @-@ Herzegovina for the first time in March 2014 . The film was shown in Sarajevo and Mostar , with Kathryn Bolkovac being invited to speak to the Bosnian audience .

= = = Box office = = =

Samuel Goldwyn Films purchased rights to distribute the film in the United States . The film had a limited release starting on August 5 , 2011 . It initially screened in seven theaters and expanded to a maximum of 70 theaters before drawing down . Its theatrical run lasted 12 weeks , during which it grossed \$ 1 @. @ 1 million .

= = = Critical response = = =

At the time of its theatrical release , The Whistleblower received mixed reviews . Review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes said critics commended Weisz 's performance but thought that " the film suffers from a literal @-@ minded approach to the material " . The website surveyed 115 critics and , categorizing the reviews as positive or negative , assessed 85 as positive and 30 as negative . Of the 115 reviews , it determined a rating average of 6 @. @ 5 out of 10 . Based on the reviews , the website gave the film a score of 74 % . Another aggregator Metacritic surveyed 30 critics and assessed 17 reviews as positive , 10 as mixed , and three as negative . Based on the reviews , it gave the film a score of 59 out of 100 , which it said indicated " mixed or average reviews " .

The Guardian 's Ed Vulliamy called The Whistleblower " the most searing drama @-@ documentary of recent years " , and The Huffington Post 's Marshall Fine said the story was " dark , grim , and harrowing " . Doris Toumarkine of Film Journal International called the movie a " well @-@ told but troubling story impressively wrapped for audiences who show up in theatres for do @-@ good cinema of a high order " . Leigh Paatsch of News.com.au said , " it is Bolkovac 's ferocious will to right so many wrongs (expertly channelled by Weisz) that keeps you glued to the screen " . Stephenie Foster of The Huffington Post gave the film a highly @-@ favorable review :

It 's a compelling and maddening story , and reflects the complexity of how international institutions function and interact and the difficulty of accountability in a situation where people have immunity for their actions . But , it 's also a story of gutsy people in tough and compromising situations making decisions that aren 't in their personal best interest .

An equally @-@ positive review appeared in The Balkan Chronicle :

Kondracki shows great promise with her direction . Pacing is tight for the most part , and the film

feels well polished ... The film is unsatisfying only in its conclusion . This is not the fault of the filmmakers who choose to stay true to Bolkovac 's story . No one was ever brought to justice . A few of men were fired and sent home , but everyone had diplomatic immunity so no one ever faced criminal charges . Two million people worldwide are still being trafficked .

Allison Willmore of The A.V. Club gave The Whistleblower a negative review , criticizing the producers for making its antagonists one @-@ dimensional : " There 's no hint of the erosion of morality that led to this point . " Peter Rainer of The Christian Science Monitor called the film 's pace " frustratingly uneven " , but commended the actors ' performances : Condurache " makes Raya 's fears tremblingly palpable " . Stephen Holden of The New York Times wrote that the film " tells a story so repellent that it is almost beyond belief . Its conclusion ? that in the moral quagmire of war and its aftermath , human trafficking and corruption are collateral damage ? is unutterably depressing . " He praised Weisz 's performance as " the strongest element " of the production .

The actors ' performances received overall praise from reviewers . Camerin Courtney of Christianity Today was dismayed that the main character engaged in a sexual relationship with a married man , but Weisz " is wonderful as Bolkovac , a no @-@ nonsense civil servant who is stunned at what she walks into " while " Vanessa Redgrave is a needed touch of strength and warmth as her mentor Madeleine , and David Strathairn is at his government thriller best as Peter Ward , an Internal Affairs agent . Raya is heart @-@ breaking as the young victim . " Steve Rea of The Post and Courier praised Redgrave 's acting in the supporting role of Madeleine Rees as " forceful , elegant , precise " . Mick LaSalle of the San Francisco Chronicle said , " Weisz gives a psychologically astute performance as a woman who can 't leave things alone . " Rex Reed of The Observer called her " superb " in the lead role .

Kondracki 's graphic depiction of violence was controversial . Bob Mondello of NPR called it " sobering " , but felt the scenes detracted from the film and should have been more subtle . Ryan Rojas of Tonight at the Movies described the film as " gritty and merciless " , and cautioned that certain scenes might offend some viewers : " While the scenes do work as reinforcing the horror of the events , it really just made it obvious that the way that the director was going to win over fans was to simply shock them into numbness , as scenes showing rape , mutilation , and murder are shown in very disturbing fashion . " Christian Hamaker of Crosswalk.com wrote :

The film is almost unremittingly grim , which may seem appropriate for such a horrifying subject , but the effect on the viewer is that of being struck repeatedly with a sledgehammer . Sex trafficking is bad . Really bad ! Did you get that , or do you need to watch a few more scenes of physical and sexual brutality ? Don 't worry : The Whistleblower has those aplenty . It takes brutality into the realm of gratuitousness , all in the name of showing the horrors of the issue it 's addressing .

A review in The Balkan Chronicle , an Internet @-@ based newspaper reporting from the Balkans , disagreed with the opinion that the violence was unnecessarily explicit or sensationalized : " Sugarcoating it would do no one any good . Grisly authenticity is one of the film 's greatest aspects . " Later , when Bolkovac spoke at a screening of the film in Bosnia , it was reported that her message was well @-@ received and discussion about the events that occurred in the late 1990s " did not fail to engage and provoke " .

= = = Home media = = =

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment released the film on DVD on January 15 , 2012 . The movie was reportedly more successful on Blu @-@ ray Disc than in theatres , and film critic Lynette Porter said that the subject 's serious nature made it better @-@ suited for television .

= = = Accolades = = =

= = Aftermath = =

Consistent with Bolkovac 's account , The Whistleblower portrays DynCorp International employees

as participants in the postwar Bosnian sex trade with the UN turning a blind eye . UN Secretary @-@ General Ban Ki @-@ moon hosted a screening of the film and promised action would be taken to prevent further instances of human trafficking . Bolkovac responded , " Unfortunately , the widespread horror is already there . This is not going to be simple or a quick fix . " She said that in addition to Bosnia , peacekeepers had violated human rights in Nigeria , Kosovo , Burundi , Sierra Leone , the Congo , Liberia , Cambodia , Iraq , Afghanistan , Haiti , Colombia , Guinea and Sudan . Kondracki added that while she wanted to be optimistic and hoped that the screening would " lead to genuine discussion and thought about the UN 's involvement in sex trafficking and other crimes " , she worried that it might not have the desired lasting impact : " I know we are going to hear a lot about what has been done since the time depicted in this film , but rhetoric only goes so far . The situation has escalated . " Following the theatrical release of *The Whistleblower* , *The Guardian* reported that other UN officials attempted to downplay the events depicted and that initiatives against trafficking in Bosnia were aborted .

DynCorp International spokesperson Ashley Burke said :

I haven 't seen the movie so I can 't comment on its content , but I can tell you that , when we contacted the film 's distributor to learn more about the movie , we were informed that the film ' is a fictionalized dramatic presentation ' that while inspired by Ms. Bolkovac 's experiences , is not based on her book . There was no threatened legal action taken to ensure they did not use the company 's name in the film .