

Filmmakers, actors, writers and doctors denounce Israeli violence against Gaza

David Walsh
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The murderous violence unleashed against the population of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military has horrified and outraged masses of people across the globe. Numerous filmmakers, actors, artists, doctors and scientists have raised their voices in public to denounce the homicidal attack.

In an open letter published July 28 in Madrid, dozens of Spanish film directors, actors, musicians, writers and others declared their indignation against “the genocide being perpetrated by the Israeli occupation army against the population of the Gaza Strip.” Prominent among the signatories are award-winning actors Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz and filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar.

The letter explains: “Gaza is living through horror these days, besieged and attacked by land, sea and air. Palestinians’ homes are being destroyed, they are being denied water, electricity [and] free movement to their hospitals, schools and fields while the international community does nothing.” It charges Israel with disregard for human rights and “state terrorism.”

Bardem has been especially outspoken. In an op-ed piece published in the Spanish newspaper *El Diario* on July 25, the actor, who won an Academy Award in 2007, noted that in the face of the current horrors, “there is NO place for distance or neutrality. It’s a war of occupation and extermination waged against a people with no means ... I can’t understand this barbarism, even more cruel and incomprehensible considering all of the horrible things the Jewish people have gone through in the past. Only geopolitical alliances, that hypocritical mask of business—for example, the sale of weapons—explains the shameful position taken by the US, the EU [European Union] and Spain.”

In his comment, Bardem acknowledged that he would come under attack by the pro-Israeli lobby (which of course he has), and continued, “I have very dear close friends who are Jewish and ... being Jewish does not

automatically mean you support this massacre, just like being Hebrew does not mean you are a Zionist, just like being Palestinian does not automatically make you a Hamas terrorist. That’s just as absurd as saying that being German makes you a Nazi.”

Putting the lie to the claim that all Israelis are united behind the Netanyahu regime, a group of Israeli filmmakers interrupted the program at the Jerusalem Film Festival on July 14 to call on the Israeli government “to cease fire.” They urged the government “not to send our troops to be killed again, in another pointless, cruel military campaign; we call it to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Palestinian people and its leaders, to achieve a viable peace for both sides.”

Criticizing the Israeli media, which only focused on the suffering of Israeli citizens, the filmmakers’ statement went on, “Today, we want to direct those cameras to the suffering of Gaza residents, men, women and children killed during the last few days. Those filming the suffering of Israelis should be courageous and honest enough to film the killing and destruction in Gaza as well, and tell that story as well.”

Filmmakers Efrat Corem, Shira Geffen, Ronit Elkabetz, Keren Yedaya, Tali Shalom Ezer, Nadav Lapid, Shlomi Elkabetz and Bozi Gete signed the statement, which further pointed out, “Children in Gaza do not enjoy the protection of the Iron Dome systems. They have no residential secured spaces, and no sirens. Children living in Gaza today are our partners in peace tomorrow.”

A number of filmmakers participating in the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival solidarized themselves later in the month with the Israeli group. Their statement observed that “in these violent days, it is impossible to talk only about cinema while ignoring the killing and horrifying events” taking place. It went on: “With the invasion of Gaza now underway, this is not a time to ... be intimidated into silence by those who fear talking about

the roots of this tragedy: Israel's ongoing occupation, and the growth of extremism and racism inside Israel and in Hamas."

The statement was signed by nineteen directors, including Academy Award winners Jeffrey Friedman (*Common Threads: Stories From the Quilt*) and Jeffrey D. Brown (*Molly's Pilgrim*), Doug Block (*51 Birch Street*) and Deborah Kaufman and Alan Snitow (*Thirst*).

A group of actors, writers, artists and others has produced a four-minute video, #GazaNames, which consists of various well-known individuals holding signs with the names of Palestinians, young and old, killed by the recent Israeli bombings and shellings.

Playwright and actor Wallace Shawn, who provides a voiceover for the video, explains, "The Israeli leaders seem sincere when they say they believe that their actions are appropriate. Apparently, one of 'us' is worth many more of 'them.' American leaders know they are lying when they defend the murder of children in their beds. And we, the public, pay for the bombs, pay for the airplanes, and pretend not to notice what's going on."

The video, asserts its organizers, "is a first of its kind expression of support for Palestinian freedom, equality and justice." Among the participants are filmmakers Jonathan Demme, Ken Loach and Mira Nair, writers Tony Kushner, Deborah Eisenberg and Eve Ensler, musicians Roger Waters, Brian Eno and Chuck D, director André Gregory and former professional basketball player Detlef Schrempf.

The *Hollywood Reporter* commented July 26 that "director Jonathan Demme, Tori Amos, Rob Schneider, Kim Kardashian, Mark Ruffalo, Anthony Bourdain, Roger Waters, NBA stars Dwight Howard and Amare Stoudemire, Italy's goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, D.L. Hughley, Mia Farrow, Whoopi Goldberg, Stephen Hawking and Annie Lennox are among the other big names who have weighed in with some degree of support for the people of Gaza or outright criticism of the Israeli government."

When actress and singer Selena Gomez posted an image on Instagram, with the message, "It's About Humanity: Pray for Gaza," more than 500,000 fans responded that they "liked" the message. The image also brought down the wrath of Israeli supporters on Gomez.

Two dozen prominent doctors and scientists from the UK and Italy published an open letter denouncing Israeli military aggression in Gaza in a letter to *The Lancet*, the leading medical journal, published July 22.

The statement reads in part: "We ask our colleagues, old

and young professionals, to denounce this Israeli aggression. We challenge the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre, a so-called 'defensive aggression'. In reality it is a ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity. We wish to report the facts as we see them and their implications on the lives of the people.

"We are appalled by the military onslaught on civilians in Gaza under the guise of punishing terrorists. This is the third large-scale military assault on Gaza since 2008. Each time the death toll is borne mainly by innocent people in Gaza, especially women and children, under the unacceptable pretext of Israel eradicating political parties and resistance to the occupation and siege they impose."

The *Lancet* open letter continues, "The massacre in Gaza spares no one, and includes the disabled and sick in hospitals, children playing on the beach or on the roof top, with a large majority of non-combatants. Hospitals, clinics, ambulances, mosques, schools, and press buildings have all been attacked, with thousands of private homes bombed, clearly directing fire to target whole families killing them within their homes, depriving families of their homes by chasing them out a few minutes before destruction. ... None of these are military objectives. These attacks aim to terrorise, wound the soul and the body of the people, and make their life impossible in the future, as well as also demolishing their homes and prohibiting the means to rebuild."

The statement by the doctors and scientists provoked a venomous and well-orchestrated response from pro-Israeli organizations and media. All such critics are inevitably abused as "anti-Semites" or "anti-Jewish," defenders of "terrorism" or "pro-Hamas."



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