

Actors, filmmakers, musicians, writers speak out against Israeli war crimes

David Walsh
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As the Israeli military steps up its campaign of mass murder in Gaza, with each day bringing news of further and greater atrocities, opposition to its operations continues to grow worldwide. While every Western government pledges support for the destruction of Gaza and the Palestinians, popular sentiment is very different. There is widespread sympathy for the suffering people of Gaza, undergoing a siege unlike anything since the Nazi war crimes of World War II.

Artists and cultural workers have begun to give expression to the horror and disgust that tens of millions of others also feel.

More than 2,000 British filmmakers, actors, visual artists, playwrights, musicians, photographers, poets, authors, comedians, producers, curators, DJs, architects and designers have signed an open letter asserting that “Our governments are not only tolerating war crimes but aiding and abetting them.”

Signatories to the strongly worded appeal include more than 600 visual and fine artists in varying genres, 200 musicians, 140 filmmakers and 80 actors. Prominent film directors Mike Leigh, Michael Winterbottom and Asif Kapadia signed the letter. The actors include Tilda Swinton, Charles Dance, Steve Coogan, Miriam Margolyes, Peter Mullan, Maxine Peake, Khalid Abdalla and David Calder; among the playwrights are Tanika Gupta, Abbie Spallen and Gillian Slovo. The many artists include Robert del Naja, Tai Shani, Oreet Ashery, Larissa Sansour, Rosalind Nashashibi, P. Staff, Florence Peake and Georgina Starr.

The signers assert, “We are witnessing a crime and a catastrophe. Israel has reduced much of Gaza to rubble, and cut off the supply of water, power, food and medicine to 2.3 million Palestinians. In the words of the UN’s undersecretary for humanitarian affairs, ‘the spectre of death’ is hanging over the territory.”

The five-paragraph statement goes on to insist that “Palestinians whose grandparents were forced out of their homes at the barrel of a gun are again being told to flee—or face collective punishment on an unimaginable scale. Dispossessed of rights, described by Israel’s minister of defence as ‘human animals,’ they have become people to whom almost anything can be done.”

Denouncing the various governments for aiding and abetting crimes, the letter warns that there “will come a time when they are held to account for their complicity.” It continues: “But for now, while condemning every act of violence against civilians and every infringement of international law whoever perpetrates them, our obligation is to do all we can to bring an end to the unprecedented

cruelty being inflicted on Gaza.”

The open letter concludes:

We support the global movement against the destruction of Gaza and the mass displacement of the Palestinian people. We demand that our governments end their military and political support for Israel’s actions. We call for an immediate ceasefire and the opening of Gaza’s crossings to allow humanitarian aid to enter unhindered.

Artists in various parts of the world have made their views known on the recent events.

US actor John Cusack placed the following message on social media:

I was out at the Palestinian march in Chicago. I’ll tell you what I didn’t hear; I didn’t hear death to Israel, I didn’t hear death to Jews, I didn’t hear people celebrating the murders of Israeli civilians. What I DID hear is – we must free Palestine from a brutal occupation – people concerned for their loved ones, in a hell zone, stuck without food, water and power. Deep anguish over people being told to leave and bombed as they left.

Award-winning British actor Riz Ahmed wrote on Instagram that “What happened in Israel last week was horrific and wrong. The pain and fear so many are feeling is deep, and real.” He went on to add that what’s occurring “in Gaza now, and has been happening in Palestine under the Occupation for decades, is horrific and wrong. The depth and reality of this suffering cannot be ignored. If we look in only one direction, we will go even deeper into darkness.”

Ahmed continued:

But that is exactly what is happening right now. We are being asked to look away while the civilians of Gaza, half of them children, are running out of time. If we are on the side of humanity, we must urgently speak up to try and

avert the loss of innocent life. This means calling for an end to the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza's civilians and vital infrastructure, the denial of food, water, and electricity, and the forced displacement of people from their homes. These are morally indefensible war crimes.

At a demonstration of a thousand people outside the White House Monday, organized by the Jewish groups If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace, writer and actor Wallace Shawn spoke to the crowd. In part, he observed, "Like anyone who is Jewish, millions of my relatives have been massacred. You'd think that would teach everybody from that background that this is a tragedy that should be avoided, that hatred against particular groups is wrong. ...

"What's happening right now [in Gaza] is certainly one of the most deliberate cruelties inflicted on a group of people that I can remember and that my government has supported." Shawn added, "Even in Vietnam, there was a whole elaborate explanation that people gave, they didn't quite admit that they were slaughtering the innocent. This is very deliberate. ... I also don't believe in revenge, and that's what this is." At one point, Shawn carried a sign that read, "My grief is not your weapon."

Famed conductor and musician Daniel Barenboim commented on Instagram that he had followed "the events of the weekend with horror and the utmost worry as I see the situation in Israel/Palestine worsening to unimaginable depths." He continued: "Hamas' attack on the Israeli civilian population is an outrageous crime, which I condemn fiercely. The death of so many in southern Israel and Gaza is a tragedy that will loom for a long time to come." He added that the "extent of this human tragedy is not only in lives lost but also hostages taken, homes destroyed, and communities devastated. An Israeli siege on Gaza constitutes a policy of collective punishment, which is a violation of human rights."

Barenboim explained that, in his opinion, "the only path to peace between Israel and Palestine is a path based on humanism, justice, equality and an end to the occupation rather than military action, and I find myself today grounded in this belief more strongly than ever. In these trying times and with these words, I stand in solidarity with all victims and their families."

US singer-songwriter Kehlani spoke at a pro-Palestinian rally October 14 in downtown Los Angeles, asserting that the issues were perfectly clear: "I think it's black and white, and you have a choice to see it or not... I want all my followers and peers to sit on the right side of history. I want them to make a decision that is larger than them. I want them to make an unselfish one. I want them to make an obvious one. And I just hope they choose to do the right thing." The singer said she was going to "keep reiterating that it's not that complicated of a decision to make."

Actress Susan Sarandon posted the latest death toll from Gaza and appealed to her followers to demand a ceasefire. "Demand an end to apartheid. For peace for all our children," she wrote.

Lebanese actress Laila Abdallah shared videos on her Instagram account showing the destruction in Gaza following Israel's airstrikes. Also on Instagram, British rapper Lowkey reported on

the number of children killed so far in Israel's attacks on Gaza.

Supermodel Gigi Hadid, whose father is Palestinian, posted a comment October 10 condemning the "terrorising of innocent people," and wrote that her dreams for a free Palestine were not at the cost of Jewish people. "While I have hopes and dreams for Palestinians, none of them include the harm of a Jewish person."

More recently, Hadid denounced claims that support for Palestine was antisemitism. She commented, "There is nothing Jewish about the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians. Condemning the Israeli government is not antisemitic and supporting Palestinians is not supporting Hamas." The Israeli government felt nervous enough to directly attack Hadid on social media, prompting death threats against her.

On Instagram, talented Egyptian-American actor-filmmaker Ramy Youssef (*Ramy*) shared images of Palestinian and Israeli artists he had worked with. Youssef also appealed for an end to the destruction in Gaza:

There are hostages and dead bodies and Gaza is on the brink of being destroyed. Entire generations of families. These are civilians with no recourse and nowhere to go. A million people are being asked to evacuate to nowhere. The people of Gaza do not deserve to pay the price for our failings. If Gaza is erased, history will see we stood by that we failed to find our humanity.

According to the Palestine news agency WAFA, the "Middle East's top actors, including Karim Abedal Aziz, Sulaff Fawakherji, Monther Rayahneh, Mohamed Henedi, Kinda Alloush, Horeya Farghaly, Sherihan, Ahmed Helmy, Takla Chamoun and Fifi Abdo, were among the celebrities who used their social media platforms to voice support for Palestinians."



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