

Indian-Canadian poet Rupri Kaur rejects White House invitation over Gaza mass murder

Penny Smith
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Indian-Canadian poet Rupri Kaur has joined the growing chorus of artists and cultural figures condemning the genocidal onslaught in Gaza by imperialist-backed Israel.

Kaur had been invited to a Diwali event at the White House on Wednesday hosted by Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. Last week, she rejected the offer in protest against the Biden administration's full backing of Israel's assault on Gaza.

In a principled statement posted to the social media platform X (Twitter), the poet writes forcefully that she would refuse "any invitation from an institution that supports the collective punishment of a trapped civilian population—50% of whom are children."

"Today," she continues, "the American government is not only funding the bombardment of Gaza, they continue to justify this genocide against Palestinians—regardless of how many refugee camps, health facilities, and places of worship are blown to bits."

Kaur explains that her invitation to the Diwali celebration at the White House was based on mere tokenism, and as "a Sikh woman, I will not allow my likeness to be used in whitewashing this administration's actions."

Diwali, India's largest and most important holiday observed throughout South Asia, "is the celebration of righteousness over falsehood and knowledge over ignorance," Kaur explains. "I have always used this day to reflect on what it means to fight for freedom against oppression," she writes.

Kaur's statement notes the catastrophic death toll of innocent civilians and the point-blank refusal of the Biden administration to call for a humanitarian

ceasefire. On the criminal methods being employed largely funded and developed by Washington, she points out, "We have seen Israel use white phosphorus bombs, which Amnesty International say must be investigated as a war crime."

Kaur's statements are courageous in the context of an intensifying censorship campaign internationally that is smearing cultural workers critical of Israel's genocide as "antisemitic." In a particularly principled passage, she writes that, "As a community, we cannot remain silent or agreeable just to get a seat at the table. It comes at too high a cost to human life."

Her letter ends with the pointed comment: "When a government's actions dehumanize people anywhere in the world, it is our moral imperative to call for justice. Do not be afraid. Stand with the world and demand a humanitarian ceasefire. Many voices will join you when you speak. Let us sign petitions. Attend protests. Boycott. Call our reps and say—stop the genocide."

Kaur, who immigrated to Canada from India with her family when she was 5, is widely known for poetry that uses simple themes and style. In 2014, at just 21 years of age, she self-published the book *Milk and Honey*, a collection of poems exploring heartbreak, trauma and the immigrant experience, which sold over three million copies and has been credited with inspiring a renewed interest among young people in poetry.



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