

Over 1,300 British actors, artists sign letter protesting censorship of pro-Palestine views by art institutions

Sandy English
1 December 2023

More than a thousand British and Irish actors, writers, artists, directors, critics, musicians and playwrights have signed a petition demanding that art institutions stop their censorship of pro-Palestinian artists and individuals in the cultural field who seek to defend the Palestinian people from the Israeli genocide.

Some of the better-known signatories include Academy Award-winning actress Olivia Colman, who played Queen Elizabeth in the popular television series, *The Crown*, Harriet Walter, an Emmy Award winner for her role in *Succession*, now starring in the science fiction drama, *Silo*, Olivier Award winner Juliet Stevenson, Nicola Coughlan of *Derry Girls* and *Bridgerton* and Aimee Lou Wood, a BAFTA award winner for her role in the series *Sex Education*.

The petition, sponsored by the group Artists for Palestine UK, is addressed to the Arts and Culture sector and states in part:

“The scale of violence unfolding in Gaza demands our collective attention and action.

“Members of Israel’s far-right government are openly calling for ethnic cleansing.

“The use of starvation as a weapon of war, along with denial of water and electricity, is cruel beyond words.

“The wholesale destruction of civilian infrastructure, the bombing of hospitals, schools, churches and mosques, the killing of 14,500 people in a matter of weeks, amount to a policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. The United Nations and hundreds of legal scholars have called on the international community to prevent genocide.

“As artists, we cannot remain silent in the face of such egregious violations of international humanitarian law.

“While catastrophe unfolds, we have observed a glaring absence of statements of solidarity with Palestinian people from most UK arts organisations.

“We find it deeply troubling and, frankly, indicative of a disturbing double standard that expressions of solidarity, which have been readily offered to other peoples facing brutal oppression, have not been extended to Palestinians.”

The letter continues, “Far from supporting our calls for an end to the violence, many cultural institutions in Western countries are systematically repressing, silencing and stigmatising Palestinian voices and perspectives. This includes targeting and threatening the livelihoods of artists and arts workers who express solidarity with Palestinians, as well as cancelling performances, screenings, talks, exhibitions, and book launches.”

The letter concludes by saying, “To stay silent in the face of mass injustice and worsening humanitarian crisis would be an abrogation of moral duty. To actively silence the principled artists and workers who do fulfil this responsibility is a failure to meet legal obligations on freedom of expression and anti-discrimination.”

The letter cites several notorious incidents of censorship by arts institutions in the last six weeks, including:

· The Lisson Gallery in London canceled a show of Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei on November 14 because he posted a comment on Twitter/X that read, “The sense of guilt around the persecution of the Jewish people has been, at times, transferred to offset the Arab world.” The Lisson Gallery indicated in a tweet that this was antisemitic.

· The International Documentary Festival Amsterdam issued a statement condemning protesters at its opening night on November 8 for holding up a banner that said, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free that read, “we believe that this slogan should not be used in any way and by anybody anymore.” Several participants in the festival have withdrawn their work in protest, including the Palestinian Film Institute.

· A media witch-hunt against the new director of the Swiss museum Kunsthalle Basel, Mohamed Almusibli, for signing a letter in support of Palestine published in *Artforum*, which cost one of *Artforum*’s editors his job and generated widespread opposition in the arts community. Basel art professionals have responded in his defense.

· The call by Lars Henrik Gass, the director of the 2024 International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, on the festival’s official Facebook page to attend a Zionist rally and vilifying Palestinians, and Gass’s subsequent cancellation of the themed program of the festival by curators signing a protest letter.

· The cancellation of Haitian-American writer Anais Duplan’s exhibition on afrofuturism by the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany because Duplan had made statements on Instagram in which he termed, in the words of the museum, “the Israeli military operation in Gaza a genocide.”

· The cancellation of book events, including that of Palestinian writer Adania Shibli at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

· The rescinding of the German city of Bochum’s Peter Weiss Prize from British author Sharon Dodua Otoo because of alleged support for the organization Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), which supports sanctioning the Zionist state.

· The letter also refers to the dropping of Melissa Barrera from the film *Scream VII* and the funding cuts to Oyoun center in Berlin by the state government.

A powerful mass movement against the genocide in Gaza has emerged around the world, including in imperialist countries such as the United States, France, Germany and Britain. This movement is not only defending the Palestinians against Israeli mass murder, but also its own right to exist, to simply speak the truth—which millions of people understand—that the destruction by missiles, bombs, tanks and snipers of an entire people is taking place before our eyes.

This censorship includes restrictions on displaying the Palestinian flag in Germany, the right to assemble in France, media witch-hunts and slander from the floor of the Senate in the United States and especially the full force of the state in Britain. As the WSWs noted recently, “The UK police have arrested hundreds of people for demonstrating in opposition to the genocide in Gaza—often merely for displaying signs.”

The arts establishment has followed suit with cowardly censorship and artists are now playing a vital role in defending the right of millions to call things as they are and to demand an end to the homicidal assault on the Palestinians.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)