

## Kneecap win worldwide backing from musicians over Gaza witch-hunt

Steve James  
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The stance taken by Irish hip hop trio Kneecap in defence of the Palestinians in Gaza has won mass international support. The trio's longstanding efforts on behalf of the Palestinian people and outrage at the ongoing massacre in Gaza became a global event with their projection at the Coachella festival in the US that "Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people... It is being enabled by the U.S. government who arm and fund Israel despite their war crimes. F\*ck Israel; free Palestine".

Ever since, Kneecap have been at the centre of a global political and media witch-hunt, with concerts cancelled and Britain's Metropolitan Police launching an investigation by its counter terror unit.

Designed to intimidate, this has instead generated mass revulsion and opposition.

An open letter, "Artists Say No to Censorship" circulated by Heavenly Recordings, Kneecap's record label, has won backing from over 100 US, British and Irish bands, musicians and DJs. The letter states:

This past week has seen a clear, concerted attempt to censor and ultimately de-platform the band Kneecap.

In Westminster and the British media, senior political figures have been openly engaged in a campaign to remove Kneecap from the public eye, with veiled threats being made over their scheduled performances at gigs, outdoor events and music festivals, including Glastonbury.

Chillingly, it is also clear to us that influential figures and personalities within the wider music industry are attempting to influence this campaign of intimidation.

As artists, we feel the need to register our

opposition to any political repression of artistic freedom.

In a democracy, no political figures or political parties should have the right to dictate who does and does not play at music festivals or gigs that will be enjoyed by thousands of people.

The question of agreeing with Kneecap's political views is irrelevant: it is in the key interests of every artist that all creative expression be protected in a society that values culture, and that this interference campaign is condemned and ridiculed.

Furthermore, it is also the duty of key leadership figures in the music industry to actively defend artistic freedom of expression — rather than seek to silence views which oppose their own."

Those signing include: Christy Moore, David Holmes, Dexys, Fontaines DC, Leftfield, Massive Attack, Mogwai, Orbital, Doves, Ash, Paul Weller, Primal Scream, Pulp, Ren, Sleaford Mods, Idles, Enter Shikari, Softplay, Super Furry Animals, Brian Eno, Mary Wallopers, The Pogues, Thin Lizzy and many more, no small number of whom have themselves publicly opposed the Gaza genocide.

Bristol based pioneering electronic artists Massive Attack posted their own powerful and moving statement "Kneecap are not the story", against the genocide and in Kneecap's defence:

If senior politicians can find neither the time, nor the words to condemn, say, the murder of

fifteen voluntary aid workers in Gaza, or the illegal starvation of a civilian population as a method of warfare, or the killing of thousands & thousands of children in the same territory, by a state in possession of the highest precision weapons on earth; how much notice should a music festival take of their moral advice on booking performing acts?

As a band that has spoken publicly for more than 30 years about the illegal occupation, apartheid system and killing with impunity of thousands of Palestinians, we are hyper aware of the both human costs of abject political silence, and the commercial implications of publicly expressing solidarity with an oppressed people.

Language matters of course.

The hideous murders of elected politicians Jo Cox and David Amess means there's no scope for flippancy or recklessness

But do politicians and right wing journalists strategically concocting moral outrage over the stage utterings of a young punk band, while simultaneously obfuscating or even ignoring a genocide happening in real time (including the killing of journalist in unprecedented numbers) have any right to intimidate festival events into acts of political censorship?

Kneecap are not the story

Gaza is the story

Genocide is the story

And the silence, acquiescence and support of those crimes against humanity by the elected British government is the real story.

Solidarity with all artists with the moral courage to speak out against Israeli war crimes, and the ongoing persecution and slaughter of the Palestinian people.

Massive Attack

Others backing the statement include Irish professional footballer James McClean and renowned former French footballer, now actor, Eric Cantona.

Besides the backing from artists, Kneecap's global audience has dramatically increased. The band's latest album *Fine Art* entered music charts in Italy, Brazil and

Germany for the first time, while a tally of monthly listeners on Spotify increased from 100,000 to 1.1 million. According to Billboard on demand streams in the US alone of Kneecap's US shows totalled 431,000 in the week before Coachella. Two weeks later the weekly figure had nearly doubled to 852,000.

The band also continue to sell out their gigs that have not been cancelled. A recently announced appearance in Belfast, August 29 with Dublin-based Fontanes DC, was sold out 35 minutes after tickets went on sale. Crowd capacity at the Boucher Road Playing Fields venue in the city is 42,500 people.

Last year, Fontanes DC produced an EP with Massive Attack and Scottish based Young Fathers in aid of Doctors Without Borders. Singer Grain Chatten told the NME, "Time is ticking and people are getting beheaded and massacred and so on. It really is the responsibility of the masses, of artists, and anyone with a voice—which is most people nowadays—to do something, say something. Which side are you on?"



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