

New York Mayor Eric Adams forces cancellation of concert by anti-genocide singer Kehlani

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A scheduled concert in New York City by singer Kehlani was canceled on Monday under pressure from the administration of Mayor Eric Adams. Though the administration expressed “security concerns” about the concert, the real reason for the cancellation is Kehlani’s outspoken opposition to the US-facilitated genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

This flagrant act of censorship is the second time that a scheduled concert by the singer has been canceled in the past several weeks. It is part of an ongoing, antidemocratic campaign to suppress any criticism of Israel and of its backer the United States.

Kehlani is an R&B singer whose successful albums include *SweetSexySavage* (2017) and *It Was Good Until It Wasn’t* (2020). She was scheduled to perform in Central Park on June 26 in a show called “Pride with Kehlani.” The concert was scheduled as part of New York’s Pride celebrations. Kehlani has variously identified herself as queer and, more recently, lesbian.

In late April, Cornell University withdrew its invitation to Kehlani to perform at its annual Slope Day celebration. In a letter dripping with dishonesty and hypocrisy, President Michael I. Kotlikoff accused the singer of antisemitism and invoked his duty to ensure that everyone “feel included.” Kotlikoff’s decision came in response to protests by a group called Cornellians for Israel, which slandered Kehlani and denounced the invitation extended to her.

On Monday, the Adams administration pressured the City Parks Foundation, the nonprofit group that organizes the SummerStage concerts, over Kehlani’s scheduled performance in Central Park. “We write to advise you that we have security concerns about this event, given the controversy surrounding Kehlani’s

scheduled performance at Cornell University (causing University officials to cancel the appearance), the security precautions needed for an event like this in Central Park and the security demands throughout the City for other Pride events during this same period of time,” wrote First Deputy Mayor Randy Mastro.

Mastro issued a thinly veiled threat to ensure that his message was clear. The New York Police Department would conduct a security assessment of the concert, he wrote. If the department found that the event posed “an unacceptable risk to public safety,” then the City Parks Foundation’s ability to hold SummerStage could be in jeopardy. “If the foundation does not promptly take steps to ensure public safety, the city reserves all rights and remedies to the foundation’s license,” Mastro wrote. The SummerStage concert series has been held since 1986.

Though Mastro signed the letter to the foundation, the threat undoubtedly came from Adams, an ex-cop who has served as New York’s mayor since 2022. Under Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump, Adams, a Democrat, has presided over the violent suppression of anti-genocide protests and encampments at Columbia University and throughout the city.

Even before Trump’s election victory last year, Adams openly began courting the would-be dictator. A vicious opponent of the working class, Adams announced that he would help Trump’s mass deportation campaign. The corrupt mayor’s toadying paid off when Trump dropped federal charges of bribery, wire fraud and violation of campaign finance laws against him. Adams is currently running for a second term as mayor as an independent. His approval rating recently hit a record low of 20 percent.

The City Parks Foundation discredited itself by caving in immediately to pressure from City Hall. “We strongly and emphatically believe in artistic expression of all kinds,” it announced unconvincingly. “However, the safety and security of our guests and artists is of the utmost importance, and in light of these concerns, the concert has been canceled.”

At least one local Democrat voiced unequivocal support for the mayor’s blatant act of censorship. “Cancelling this concert was 100 percent the correct course of action,” said City Councilwoman Julie Menin of Manhattan. “City parks should celebrate inclusivity and not seek to eradicate or denigrate any community with hate speech,” she said. “Taxpayer dollars should not be utilized to promote hate speech against any group.” Though she finds “hate speech” unacceptable and calls for inclusivity, Menin apparently has no qualms about the mass murder of Palestinians in their own homes.

While there was certainly no threat of violence from Kehlani or her fans, last month the NYPD allowed a mob of fascist Zionists to rampage through the city as they chanted “Death to Arabs,” attacking pro-Palestinian protesters and by-standers alike. There has been little outrage from Adams and other city leaders in response to the riot which was carried out during an appearance by Israel’s fascist National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, one of the leading perpetrators of the Gaza genocide and violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

“It is deeply unsettling to see elected officials using their offices to dictate the bounds of acceptable expression and muscling private entities to fall into line,” Jonathan Friedman, a managing director of PEN America, said in a statement. The nonprofit group, which has an official mission of supporting free expression, called the cancellation of Kehlani’s concert “cowardly.”

Kehlani, who has spoken out against the genocide since the beginning, appeared to be unfazed by the cancellation of the Central Park concert. She posted a screenshot of the City Parks Foundation’s statement on Instagram, writing, “They canceled this one, too,” and “lol.” Kehlani herself learned about the cancellation on social media, and not through personal communication from the foundation. “I’m so deeply grounded in my purpose, my mission, my art, my contribution,” she

wrote.

“I’m being asked and called to clarify and make a statement yet again for the millionth time that I am not antisemitic nor anti-Jew,” said in a video last month after her Cornell concert was cancelled. “I am anti-genocide, I am anti the actions of the Israeli government,” they declared, adding “I am anti an extermination of an entire people, I am anti the bombing of innocent children, men, women. That’s what I’m anti.”

The cancellation of Kehlani’s performances takes place as the counterterror unit of Britain’s Metropolitan Police investigates Northern Irish rap group Kneecap. Like the singer, the group is being targeted for its outspoken defense of the Palestinians and denunciations of Israel.

The latest onslaught came after it projected messages at the Coachella music festival in California last month, declaring “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.”

Kneecap has stood firm in the face of the Zionist-led intimidation campaign and gained mass support from fans and other artists.

The persecution of principled artists is being carried out internationally by parties across the spectrum of capitalist politics. Freedom of speech can be defended, and the genocide ended, only through the mobilization of the international working class in the fight for socialism.



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