

International backing for Kneecap's stand against genocide continues to grow

Steve James
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More musicians from across the artistic spectrum have backed Irish hip hop group Kneecap, signing the open letter in defence of artistic freedom published by their record label, Heavenly Recordings.

Kneecap shot to global prominence last month when they projected “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” as the backdrop to their set at the Coachella Festival in California.

The band’s statement explained that “the British government continues to supply arms to Israel, even after scores of NHS doctors warned [Prime Minister] Keir Starmer in August that children were being systematically executed with sniper shots to the head. Instead of defending innocent people or the principles of international law, the powerful in Britain have abetted slaughter and famine.”

Their statement on X/Twitter has received over 64,000 likes.

Thus far, efforts to “de-platform” Kneecap, led by the Labour government in Britain and the political, media and music establishment on both sides of the Atlantic, have largely backfired. Although Kneecap have been subjected to a deluge of moral outrage from apologists for mass murder and are under investigation by London’s Metropolitan Police, musicians and music fans have made clear their opposition to their persecution, justified with two out of context videos. While gigs have been cancelled, new ones have been booked and quickly sold out. Downloads of Kneecap’s music also indicate support for their stance.

Heavenly Recordings’ Open Letter opposing the “campaign of intimidation” against artists insisted, “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.”

Among those signing recently are, according to NME, Paloma Faith. The actor and soul singer has previously participated in a benefit concert for Medical Aid for Palestine along with Kneecap, Paul Weller, Primal Scream, Liam Bailey and Lowkey. She told a demonstration against the Gaza bombings earlier this year, “I know that Israel has violated every ceasefire agreement it has ever signed. But even with that knowledge, after months of watching this genocide, I wasn’t prepared for the new depths of brutality that Israel has descended to.”

Poet, writer and musician Kae (formerly Kate) Tempest, who was herself the target of threats in 2017 for her consistent defence of Palestinian rights, has also signed, as has Kevin Rowland, front man of Dexys Midnight Runners. Rowland told BBC Ulster, “If you only allow free speech for people to say what you want, it’s not free speech, is it?”

Other recent signatories include Australian punk band Amyl and the Sniffers and Tom Morello, formerly of Rage Against the Machine, who is musical director for seminal heavy metal band Black Sabbath’s final gig. Black Sabbath lead singer Ozzy Osbourne’s wife, Sharon, is at the centre of pro-Israel efforts to get Kneecap barred from the US. Morello has long been an outspoken defender of the Palestinians, participating in demonstrations and recently supporting student encampments.

The famous Irish rebel folk band, the Wolfe Tones, also supported Kneecap.

One of the band’s founder members, Brian Warfield, told Ireland’s *Sunday World*: “We are totally behind Kneecap. I believe those young lads are very courageous and we don’t want them left out there on

their own. They are only starting their career and we totally and absolutely support them. It's an absolute disgrace that they are being portrayed as public enemy number one at the moment.

"We went through that ourselves for years. Our music was banned from radio by the then Minister Conor Cruise O'Brien under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act in the '70s. That Act banned paramilitaries from speaking on the airwaves, but he included us in that saying he didn't want to hear any more Wolfe Tones-type songs on the radio because it was supporting violence in the North.

"Kneecap were just drawing attention to the atrocities in Gaza...They want to... highlight what's going on because nobody seems to be supporting the Palestinians and nobody seems to be looking at what really is happening, which is a genocide and ethnic cleansing. And I have no doubt about that...it's what Netanyahu wants."

Another Irish musician supporting Kneecap is rock/folk singer Damian Dempsey.

He wrote on Instagram: "When the leaders of the world turn their heads away from the genocide of the most oppressed people on earth, and the strongest in my opinion, bearing the brunt of the trauma from a German genocide that they had nothing to do with, three young peaceful warrior poets from the occupied colonised six counties of the North of Ireland are putting everything they have out on the line to call out the war criminal Netanyahu and his enablers Donald Trump and Joe Biden..."

Indicating the nervousness in the media about Kneecap's growing support, the *London Evening Standard* ran an article by music critic Lisa Wright titled, "Why Kneecap should play Glastonbury: 'to deplatform them is dangerous'". The article quoted more signatories.

Laurie Vincent of punk duo Softplay said, "Kneecap are hands down the three most caring men we've ever met in all our years of our touring. Their band has a cultural significance we haven't seen since the original punk bands of the late seventies. They are fearlessly tackling issues that many aren't brave enough to even get close to. To deplatform them would send a dangerous message to all those who follow."

Jason Williamson of the Sleaford Mods told Wright, "The live stage is where we as musicians truly come

alive, and Kneecap's platform should not be revoked simply because the message encourages discussion."

Faris Badwan commented, "People should always be free to hold the government to account, no matter which people, no matter which government. One rule for everyone. No race is superior to another."

Singer and songwriter Nadine Shah was quoted as posting: "The story isn't Kneecap. The real story is genocide. Kneecap are being made an example of to scare us into silence from speaking out. But if we are silent, we are complicit. So do not let artists be censored. Get louder. Free Palestine."

The broad expressions of support, inspired by Kneecap's own determined stand, has pushed back against efforts to silence the band and cancel their gigs.

After an appearance at the Eden Sessions 2025 festival in Cornwall was cancelled, as well as a replacement gig at the Plymouth Pavilions, three gigs on consecutive nights have been organised in the city at the Depo, audience capacity 750.

The band have a full itinerary for the summer with gigs in England, including the June 28 Glastonbury Festival, Denmark, Spain, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Ireland, France, Scotland, Wales, Poland, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Hungary and Belgium.

Thus far, demands from the British Labour government, the Conservative opposition, the Scottish National Party in Scotland and the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland that gigs in Belfast, Glasgow and at Glastonbury be cancelled have all been rejected.

A series of gigs in Germany, however, have all been shut down. Replacement gigs for cancelled appearances at the Hurricane and Southside festivals were organised for early September in Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg. These have now been cancelled also.



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