

Thousands of directors, actors, writers and others pledge not to work with Israeli film institutions “implicated in genocide”

David Walsh
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As of this writing, more than 4,000 writer-directors, actors and other film industry workers have signed a pledge

not to screen films, appear at or otherwise work with Israeli film institutions—including festivals, cinemas, broadcasters and production companies—that are implicated in genocide and apartheid against the Palestinian people.

Expressing the horror and outrage felt by vast numbers of people about the ongoing Zionist slaughter in Gaza and the Netanyahu regime’s murderous policies throughout the region, the number of signatories is growing by the hour.

The organizers of the protest, Film Workers for Palestine, call the appeal “a historic action” and point out that the individuals making the pledge include “Oscar, BAFTA, Emmy, Cannes, Berlin, Venice, César, Goya, and Peabody Award winners.”

They write in a September 8 press release:

Actors Olivia Colman, Ayo Edebiri, Mark Ruffalo, Riz Ahmed, Tilda Swinton, and Javier Bardem, as well as writer-directors Yorgos Lanthimos, Ava DuVernay, Asif Kapadia, Emma Seligman, Boots Riley, Adam McKay, and Joshua Oppenheimer, say: “in this urgent moment of crisis, where many of our governments are enabling the carnage in Gaza, we must do everything we can to address complicity in that unrelenting horror.”

The statement explains that as “filmmakers, actors, film industry workers, and institutions, we recognize the power of cinema to shape perceptions.” It observes that the world’s highest court,

the International Court of Justice, has ruled that there is a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza, and that Israel’s occupation and apartheid against Palestinians are unlawful. Standing for equality, justice, and freedom for all people is a profound moral duty that none of us can ignore. So too, we must speak out now against the harm done to the Palestinian people.

The signatories note that they are responding to the appeals of Palestinian filmmakers

who have urged the international film industry to refuse silence, racism, and dehumanization, as well as to “do everything humanly possible” to end complicity in their oppression.

This is a reference in particular to an open letter issued by nearly 70 Palestinian filmmakers in September 2024, which decried “the relentless, decades-old dehumanization of Palestinians on small and big screens in the U.S., in Hollywood in particular,” and argued that “We must still contend with and fiercely challenge the anti-Palestinian and generally anti-Arab racist propaganda that remains all too prevalent in Western entertainment media.”

The September 2024 appeal called on “our international colleagues in the film industry, visionaries for the kind of world we would like to live in, to speak out against this genocide and the erasure, racism and censorship that enable it.” It also urged Hollywood filmmakers

to do everything humanly possible to stop and end complicity with this unspeakable horror; and to stand against working with production companies that are deeply complicit in dehumanizing Palestinians, or whitewashing and justifying Israel’s crimes against us.

Twelve months later, thousands of filmmakers and others have responded to the boycott appeal.

Other prominent signers of this week’s pledge include actors Adam Bakri (*Omar*), Alia Shawkat (*Arrested Development*), Alyssa Milano, Brian Cox, Charles Dance, Cynthia Nixon, Emma Stone, Peter Sarsgaard, Lily Gladstone (*Killers of the Flower Moon*), Eliot Page, Debra Winger, Harriet Walter, Jena Malone, Julie Christie, Juliet Stevenson, Miriam Margolyes, Kathleen Chalfant, Olivia Williams, Lena Headey, Peter Mullan, Rebecca Hall, Susan Sarandon, Rooney Mara, Joaquin Phoenix, Melissa Barbera and Guy Pearce.

Numerous film directors added their names to the pledge, among them Mike Leigh, Hany Abu Assad, Ken Loach, Mahdi Fleifel, Xavier Dolan, Babak Jalali, Jem Cohen, Boris Lojkine, John Greyson, Aki Kaurismäki, Annemarie Jacir, Ryan Fleck and Gael García Bernal.

The group of signatories come from a number of countries, primarily the US, Britain, Canada and Ireland, as well as several generations. The “breadth and width” of the personalities has a certain significance. No doubt if the effort to obtain signers were extended to the entire globe, tens of thousands of names could be gathered. The pledge was published in Spanish, Turkish, French, Arabic and Japanese.

Under “Frequently Asked Questions,” Film Workers for Palestine responds to a query about how to determine “which film entities in Israel are implicated in genocide and apartheid against the Palestinian people.”

They argue that “Israel’s public and private broadcasters have decades-old and ongoing involvement in whitewashing, denying and justifying Israel’s war crimes and the crime against humanity of apartheid.”

They continue:

Israel’s major film festivals (including but not limited to Jerusalem Film Festival, Haifa International Film Festival, Docaviv and TLVfest) continue to partner with the Israeli government while it carries out what leading experts have defined as genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Despite operating in Israel’s system of apartheid, and therefore benefiting from it, the vast majority of Israeli film production and distribution companies, sales agents, cinemas and other film institutions have never endorsed the full, internationally-recognized rights of the Palestinian people.

The pledge, “inspired by Filmmakers United Against Apartheid who refused to screen their films in apartheid South Africa,” specifies that it is directed toward institutions, not individuals. Unsurprisingly, a representative of the Israeli film and television industry termed the boycott action “misguided.”

The outpouring of outrage over the genocide is entirely healthy and welcome. This most recent appeal follows a pro-Palestinian demonstration at the Venice International Film Festival estimated to have drawn 10,000 people, perhaps the largest political protest ever held at a film event.

The steady accumulation of appeals, protests and open letters by thousands of actors, directors and others speaks to genuine anger and a growing radicalization in artistic and intellectual circles. It also hints at a political impasse that needs to be overcome. Protests aimed at government and existing parties, and even the legitimate punishment of Israeli institutions, will not change the ghastly situation. Only the movement of the international working class, coming into action against the capitalist society responsible for these world-historic crimes, can do that. The artists will have to turn their attention in that direction.



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