

Israeli documentary filmmakers support boycott of Israeli film industry over genocide

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Over 50 Israeli documentary filmmakers issued an open letter September 15 supporting an appeal by thousands in the international cinema world for a boycott of official Israeli film institutions because of the role of the Zionist government in committing a genocide in Gaza.

Signers of the letter include such notable figures as Yuval Abraham, one of the co-directors of *No Other Land*; director Avi Mograbi (*Z32* and *The First 54 Years: An Abbreviated Manual for Military Occupation*); the former chair of the Documentary Forum, Yulie Cohen, whose trilogy *My Terrorist*, *My Land Zion* and *My Brother* has won international acclaim; Barak Heymann, the head of the film school at Beit Berl College and winner of the Berlinale audience award-winner *Who's Gonna Love Me Now?*; Ada Ushpiz (*Vita Activa: The Spirit of Hannah Arendt* and *Children*); and producer Liran Atzmor (winner of the 2011 Sundance Grand Jury Prize for *The Law in These Parts*).

Their letter begins:

We, a group of documentary filmmakers in Israel, feel profound shame, pain, daily torment, and helplessness in the face of the horrors of mass murder, destruction and internal transfer (for now), and starvation that the State of Israel is carrying out in our name in Gaza.

We reject with disgust all attempts at denial, silencing, and whitewashing, with the systematic use of euphemisms—preferring to speak of “hunger” instead of “starvation” and “war” instead of “genocide.”

The letter continues:

The facts speak for themselves: about 64,000

civilians in Gaza have been killed, including some 20,000 infants and children, and more than one hundred thousand have been wounded. To these we must add the thousands of innocent Palestinians kidnapped from Gaza still held as bargaining chips in Israeli captivity, and the daily killing, destruction, and abuse in the West Bank.

The open letter condemns the October 7, 2023 Hamas raid, “even within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian struggle for national freedom and against the occupation,” but argues that the events of that day “cannot excuse this brutal war of revenge, which has already surpassed the atrocities of Hamas many times over.”

In a significant appeal to documentary filmmakers around the world, the letter addresses the complicity of the imperialist governments in the assault on Palestinian lives and fundamental rights:

We call on the international documentary community, our artistic home, to hold itself to the same standards and focus on its domestic role: resisting the silence and complicity of European and American governments in the massacre in Gaza. Our [Israeli] government thrives and gains audacity by the backing of Donald Trump, who also makes a point of neutralizing the protests of European leaders; without him, this accursed war could not have lasted so long.

In late July, 31 leading artists and intellectuals, including some of the same figures, had penned an open letter, “The starvation of Gaza is shameful. Crippling sanctions on Israel are needed.” It read:

We, Israelis dedicated to a peaceful future for our country and our Palestinian neighbours, write this with grave shame, in rage and in agony. Our country is starving the people of Gaza to death and contemplating the forced removal of millions of Palestinians from the Strip. The international community must impose crippling sanctions on Israel until it ends this brutal campaign and implements a permanent ceasefire.

Abraham and Atzmor were among that letter's signatories, along with Ra'anana Alexandrowicz (*The Law in These Parts*), Ari Folman (*Waltz with Bashir*), Nadav Lapid (*Ahed's Knee*), Samuel Maoz (*Lebanon*) and architect Eyal Weizman.

The recent letter from the Israeli documentarians follows a series of denunciations by filmmakers and actors of the genocide in Gaza.

These include the protest of thousands at the Venice International Film Festival early last month, whose organizers stated:

The Venice Film Festival must not remain an event isolated from reality, but rather become a space to denounce the genocide being carried out by Israel, the complicity of Western governments, and to offer concrete support to the Palestinian people.

On September 13 at the annual Emmy awards ceremony, honoring the most prestigious for television programming, actress Hannah Einbinder used the podium after she was given the award for best supporting actress (for the comedy series *Hacks*), to declare "Fuck ICE, free Palestine."

Most notable has been the letter signed by thousands in the film industry that calls for a boycott of the Israeli film industry, organized by the group Film Workers for Palestine. In it, signatories 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.

The letter was signed by a wide range of film and television professionals, including Olivia Colman, Ayo

Edebiri, Mark Ruffalo, Riz Ahmed, Tilda Swinton, Javier Bardem, Yorgos Lanthimos, Josh O'Connor, Emma Stone, Ava DuVernay, Asif Kapadia, Emma Seligman, Boots Riley, Hannah Einbinder, Cynthia Nixon, Adam McKay, Joshua Oppenheimer and others.

The Israeli documentarians' letter explains why they support that boycott:

As documentary filmmakers who have dedicated their lives to recording different aspects of reality in our country, and some of us, especially to documenting the occupation, we are acutely aware of the importance of recognizing the truth as a first step toward changing reality. For this reason, we wholeheartedly support the global filmmakers' boycott against us.

The Film Workers for Palestine letter also prompted a response from the Israeli film industry. Tzvi Gottlieb, CEO of the Israeli Film & TV Producers Association, told the *Hollywood Reporter* the boycott is "counterproductive," explaining, "there is no group in Israel that's been working as hard to promote anti-violence and has been as critical of this government. This industry—already small, already vulnerable—shows the damage of occupation. We need to be helped, not hurt."

In direct response to such claims, the documentary filmmakers' letter notes:

For us, there is no comfort in the complex, sensitive, and critical films we have made over the years as part of our role and mission; they do not absolve us of responsibility for the atrocities carried out in our name.



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