

Australian writers' festival bans Randa Abdel-Fattah in pro-Zionist purge backed by Labor

Richard Phillips
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In a calculated act of political censorship, the Adelaide Festival Board announced this week that academic and author Randa Abdel-Fattah had been disinvited from Adelaide Writers' Week, one of Australia's oldest and largest literary festivals, due to begin on February 27.

Abdel-Fattah, the only author of Palestinian descent on the program and the recipient of numerous literary prizes, was scheduled to speak about her recent novel *Discipline*, which focuses on the lives of two Muslim girls and exposes institutional racism and censorship in universities and the media.

The decision, which followed a recent letter to the board from the Jewish Community Council of South Australia demanding Abdel-Fattah's removal, has been angrily denounced by leading writers and cultural figures across the country and internationally. According to current estimates, more than half the scheduled speakers have decided to boycott the event.

In a statement posted on Instagram on Thursday, Abdel-Fattah accurately denounced the decision as a "blatant and shameless act of anti-Palestinian racism and censorship, and a despicable attempt to associate me with the Bondi massacre." She said she was being treated as if her very existence as a Palestinian voice had rendered her "persona non grata in cultural circles."

Yesterday, Abdel-Fattah called for the festival to apologise, retract its statement and reinstate her invitation, and urged writers to withdraw from the festival in protest. Speaking to ABC radio on Friday, she said the decision reflected "egregious and unabashed anti-Palestinian" views that had become normalised and described as "obscene" the attempt to associate her with an atrocity that "goes without saying" she had nothing to do with. She stressed that in 2026, after two years of watching the genocide of her people live-streamed from Gaza, she is now forced to declare publicly that she has "nothing to do with the Bondi atrocities."

In its January 8 statement—a model of political doublespeak—the festival board cynically claimed that while it did "not suggest in any way that Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah's or her writings have any connection with the tragedy at Bondi," her "past statements" meant it "would not be culturally sensitive to continue to program her at this unprecedented time so soon after Bondi."

Fifteen people were killed in the December 2025 mass shooting at Bondi Beach in Sydney during a Hanukkah celebration, a horrific attack that Labor governments—state and federal—and the corporate media have relentlessly exploited to intensify the witch hunt against opponents of Zionism and defenders of the Palestinian

people.

While the board explicitly conceded that Abdel-Fattah had no connection whatsoever to the Bondi atrocity, it weaponised the tragedy to claim that her mere presence at Adelaide Writers' Week (AWW) was culturally insensitive—a kind of emotional provocation against Jews—and a "risk" that must be removed in the name of "community cohesion."

The board's decision, which overrides AWW director Louise Adler and her production team, is in line with the repressive pro-Zionist attacks on democratic rights now being implemented by state and federal Labor governments in the aftermath of the Bondi terrorist attack.

In a clear, chilling message to the AWW curators, the statement boasted that the board had established a special subcommittee to "oversee the ongoing board-led review" of Writers' Week, involving "ongoing engagement with relevant government agencies" and "external experts." In other words, festival programming will now be subjected to direct input from government and unnamed "experts"—a thinly veiled reference to pro-Zionist lobbyists that have been mobilised nationally since October 2023 to silence all opposition to Israel's crimes.

South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas, a leading figure in the Labor apparatus, boasted to the media on Friday that he was "happy to make it clear" that his government opposed Abdel-Fattah's participation in the Adelaide Writers' Week program.

"I do not support the inclusion of those who actively undermine the cultural safety of others, who celebrate the death of innocent civilians, or those who doxx other artists simply because of their faith or cultural background," he said, slanderously imputing this activity to Abdel-Fattah.

Former NSW Labor Premier Bob Carr, one of the dwindling number of speakers still scheduled to appear at the AWW, publicly backed Abdel-Fattah's removal. He joined the pile-on against Abdel-Fattah, telling the *Guardian* that he believed some of Abdel-Fattah's previous statements were "counterproductive to the Palestinian cause" and that the festival board had made the right decision.

Abdel-Fattah has been hounded for years by the media, Zionist lobby groups and the political establishment—with Labor playing the key role in the witch hunting—because of her outspoken defence of Palestinian rights and condemnation of Israeli war crimes.

In February 2025, federal Education Minister Jason Clare

instigated a ten-month investigation into Abdel-Fattah's Australian Research Council Future Fellowship, an \$870,000 grant to study Arab and Muslim-Australian social movements, leading to the suspension of the grant for most of the year.

The investigation, conducted through the Australian Research Council and Macquarie University, eventually cleared her of wrongdoing and the grant was reinstated in December 2025, just days before the Bondi attack.

A previous attempt to silence her and other anti-Gaza-genocide writers was mounted at last year's Bendigo Writers Festival via the imposition of a last-minute "code of conduct" by the event's sponsors—La Trobe University and the City of Greater Bendigo.

This failed, however, after Abdel-Fattah and more than 50 other featured writers boycotted the event in protest. The "code of conduct" was introduced following agitation by a pro-Israel academic lobby group targeting Abdel-Fattah and branding her "a direct threat to the Jewish community."

The timing of the latest attack is revealing. After Labor's campaign to strip her of her Australian Research Council Future Fellowship failed, a new pretext—the Bondi shooting—was seized upon to step up the witch hunt.

Abdel-Fattah's cancellation by the Adelaide Festival Board has met with significant and rapid opposition. Within hours of the board's announcement, prominent authors angrily denounced the decision and began withdrawing from the festival. Those pulling out include British author Zadie Smith, Pulitzer Prize winner Percival Everett, former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis and Russian-Jewish writer M. Gessen.

Among the scores of local writers boycotting the festival are two-time Miles Franklin and Stella Prize winner Michelle de Kretser, Miles Franklin laureate Melissa Lucashenko, Helen Garner, former Egyptian-jailed Al Jazeera journalist Peter Greste, poet and scholar Evelyn Araluen, historian Clare Wright, Chelsea Watego, academic Bernadette Brennan, journalists Amy Remeikis and Jane Caro, and many others.

The Australia Institute, a prominent public policy think tank and long-time festival partner, has cancelled its sponsorship and events, while Writers SA, the state's peak organisation for writing and literature, has withdrawn from the event, as has South Australian publisher Pink Shorts Press.

Statements by many of those boycotting the festival go beyond the Gaza genocide, forthrightly denouncing the anti-democratic and authoritarian character of the board's decision and its consequences.

Particularly notable were comments from acclaimed Australian author Richard Flanagan (*Death of a River Guide*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *First Person*, *Question 7*). He won the 2014 Man Booker Prize for *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* and the 2024 Baillie Gifford Prize for *Question 7*, making him the first writer in history to win both Britain's major fiction and non-fiction prizes.

Flanagan said the festival board's linking of Abdel-Fattah to the Bondi massacre was a "vile" and "appalling slander" and warned: "In saying one Australian writer cannot speak, inevitably more and

more Australian writers will find themselves also unable to speak—first at festivals, soon in universities, then on public broadcasters.

"And the categories of what is unsayable and who is silenced will inevitably grow. Today it is Gaza, but next it could be the environment or social policy. As we see in the United States, the slippery categories of *terrorism* and *community cohesion* are ever-growing as forces of oppression."

The principled decision by writers, artists and organisations to boycott the Adelaide festivals is a powerful expression of the deep-seated opposition to the ongoing Gaza genocide and Labor's attacks on free speech and other basic democratic rights.

The rapid response against this repressive attack on free speech is the product of almost two and a half years of vicious assaults and pro-Zionist, state-backed victimisations against academics, creative workers, journalists, health workers, teachers and others speaking out against the Gaza genocide and Israeli war crimes. These political experiences have not been in vain but have produced a deeper understanding that fundamental rights are at stake and have deepened the resistance.

But this opposition cannot be confined to moral appeals to festival boards, governments or universities in the hope that these institutions can be pressured into changing course.

While Australian authors and writers have powerfully condemned the censorship of Abdel-Fattah, they need to recognise that this fight must be linked to a broader working-class struggle against the entire political establishment and the pro-imperialist Labor governments—state and federal.

Writers, artists and intellectuals need to orient the struggle against artistic censorship towards the working class and youth and develop it as part of a broader fight against imperialist war, militarism and social austerity. Unless a conscious, organised movement is built to oppose the turn to authoritarianism, the repressive measures now being unleashed against those speaking out against Israel's war crimes will be deployed ever more broadly against all social and political opposition.

A key step for all those opposing the political censorship of Randa Abdel-Fattah is to register and participate in the Socialist Equality Party's online public meeting at 2 p.m. (AEST) tomorrow. Titled "Bondi terror attack—a socialist assessment," the meeting has been called to discuss these vital questions.



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