

Letter to Mercedes Sosa

Sunday, July 27, 2008

Dear Mercedes Sosa,

We read that you plan to sing in a concert in Israel this fall. We write you to ask you to cancel this visit.

Your voice carries with it the love, the pain and the hopes of decades of struggle against oppression in Latin America. Your songs opened pathways into the heart of many of us--all over the world--to a deeper understanding and communion with the peasants, the workers and the indigenous communities of Latin America. Don't let your art become the ambassador of oppression, ethnic cleansing, murder and land usurpation by performing in Israel. We know that you have visited Israel before. However, the Israel you visited then appeared as if it were about to step on the path toward peace. Those hopes for a positive change that you may remember from your last visit have been dashed. Israel is today more than ever an apartheid state, a state committed to the continued violent colonization and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people of Palestine.

In 2006, virtually all leading Palestinian artists and intellectuals called for a world-wide cultural boycott of Israel, similar to that imposed on apartheid South Africa. To date, many prominent international artists, including Ken Loach, John Berger and Jean-Luc Godard and a few artists' unions, like the Irish Aosdana, have heeded the Palestinian Call and refused to perform or participate in cultural events in Israel.

If you sing in Israel you will be lending your public image and the moral authority of your art to Israel's effort to whitewash its increasingly tarnished image as a state that ignores and breaches every principle of international law and tramples upon every human right. You will also violate the Palestinian civil society's Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) that demands artists shun Israel until Israel fulfills its obligations under international law. By singing in Israel you will betray your sisters and your brothers everywhere.

As much as we try, our imagination fails us. How will you sing "cuando tengala tierra" for a state devoted to the expropriation of the land's peasants, its indigenous communities? Will you let that song become the anthem of the expropriator? How will you sing "honrar la vida" for the pleasure of an audience that sends its young men to destroy the lives of the indigenous communities of Palestine, to demolish their homes, to uproot their olive trees and to expel them from their land?

How will you sing "Hermano dame tu mano" in a state that makes not only different laws for Jews and Palestinians, but also different roads, a state that keeps four million Palestinians effectively caged behind walls and checkpoints, and millions more expelled and not allowed to return. How will you sing "sobreviviendo" in a safe concert hall, half an hour drive from communities laid waste, communities whose thousands of resisting sons and daughters are languishing in military prisons.

How will you sing "Alfonsina y el mar" in a place where Palestinian children are not allowed to see the sea?

Don't let your voice be sullied with collaboration with this oppression! Don't sing in Israel! Don't fail the struggle for freedom and equality in Palestine! Don't betray the people whose struggle echoes so closely the struggles of the people of Latin America!

We undersign this letter as Jews from all over the world. We sign as Jews because we are worried that you might think that through your visit to Israel you stand in solidarity with us Jews, on account of the terrible history of Jewish persecution in Europe. If this is so, we appreciate the intention, but we cannot appreciate the gesture. We want and welcome being free of fear and free of persecution. But we do not believe in liberation through the oppression of others, nor in salvation by finding another scapegoat. We do not believe in a solidarity that asks that we hate those less privileged. We wish to live in freedom, but together with all humanity, with all people, of all backgrounds, faiths, color and origin, not by becoming ourselves usurpers and persecutors. The colonization and ethnic cleansing of Palestine does not liberate us. On the contrary, it seeks to lock us in a cycle of continuing domination and repression. In performing in Israel, you will not be standing with us, you will be betraying us as well. Please cancel your visit.

International Jewish Solidarity Network

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