

19 May, 2010

Dear Elton John:

It's funny how people can be close friends, and yet react so differently to things. You're apparently close friends with Elvis Costello – so close you hosted his wedding to Diana Krall at your 'castle' in Windsor. After just three weeks of people appealing to Elvis Costello not to perform in Israel, he's decided not to go. (His thoughtful statement is at <http://www.elviscostello.com/news/it-is-after-cosiderable-contemplation/44.>)

But months down the line from our first letter to you, with hundreds, if not thousands, of your fans appealing to you to cancel your gig in Tel Aviv (including Canadian film-maker John Greyson at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HSClZbhB5g>), you remain silent. Of course you have every right to do so. But we're wondering what this silence means.

Does it mean you think the dirty business of Israeli colonialism and ethnic cleansing has nothing to do with you? That you can play for the officers and conscripts and secret service people who will make up much of your audience in Tel Aviv without giving them the stamp of your approval? You will offer them a few hours' respite from administering beatings and torture and land-theft and house-demolition and sieges and destroying wells and denying sick people access to hospital – and the simple fact of your presence will tell them that all this cruel business, which they conduct daily, is okay with you.

Or does your silence mean you think it's more important to stand in solidarity with gays in Israel than with the Palestinians? But what about Palestinian gays? Israel has a record of sending those who've sought refuge in Israel back to the Occupied Territories. So much for Israel being 'gay-friendly'. Palestinian gay rights activist Haneen Maikey (an Israeli citizen) says, 'It's really pathetic that the Israeli state has nothing besides gay rights to promote its liberal image. Ridiculous, and in a sense hilarious, because there

are no gay rights in Israel'. To the Israeli state she says, 'Stop speaking in my name. If you want to do me a favour, stop bombing my friends, end your occupation, and leave me to rebuild my community'.

Sir Elton! – maybe you've decided, in your generous way, that you'll donate the proceeds of your Tel Aviv concert to the Global Fund, or another AIDS charity (and of course good deeds cannot be spoken about, so you don't announce it). But our appeal to you isn't about money. It's about the meaning of actions. Elvis Costello understood exactly that 'simply having your name added to a concert schedule may be interpreted as a political act...and it may be assumed that one has no mind for the suffering of the innocent'.

To his great credit, he decided that 'a silence in music is sometimes better than adding to the static'. We are asking to you to abandon the silence of your apparent indifference to our appeal, and that of thousands of your fans, and join Elvis Costello in his musical silence. Please don't play in Israel.

Yours sincerely,
Professor Haim Bresheeth
Mike Cushman
Professor Steven Rose
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead