

**AN OPEN LETTER TO PAUL SIMON**

London, 6 June 2011

Dear Paul Simon,

We know you're no stranger to controversy. When you recorded parts of 'Graceland' in apartheid South Africa with black South African musicians, you were publicly criticised by the liberation movement, the ANC, and anti-apartheid organisations, for breaking the cultural boycott.

At the time, you told the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid that you yourself had 'refused to perform in South Africa'. And since anti-apartheid icons Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela played in the live 'Graceland' tour (even though there were anti-apartheid demonstrators at some of the venues), you clearly convinced key members of the anti-apartheid movement that you were not colluding with, or intending in any way to promote, the apartheid regime.

We're struggling to see any carry-over from this situation to your forthcoming concert in Ramat Gan, Israel, on July 21. You've played in Israel before, so perhaps this event doesn't seem that important to you – just a one-night add-on to your US and European tour (and maybe that's why the Ramat Gan date doesn't figure in the tour list on your website).

But if you hope this concert in Israel can be about music, not about politics, that's not how your promoter, Marcel Avraham, sees things. In July last year he told the Israeli online news site, Ynetnews.com, that he does shows in Israel 'as a mission, a sense of Zionism, not just to make a buck'.

Whether you intend it or not, your show in Tel Aviv will make a political statement. And Avraham is absolutely clear what he believes that statement to be. He told Ynetnews that Elton John, Metallica and Rod Stewart, all under pressure to cancel their shows in Israel, had approached him 'with questions. "My answer to them was very simple. Listen", I told them. "Israel is a small country still fighting for its existence. The Arabs want to throw us to the sea. If you want to come and lend us a shoulder, by all means, we'll be delighted".'

**This hackneyed scenario – small beleaguered state teetering on the edge of extinction -- won't wash any more. Israel's army has dominated the region for the past 40-something years, and the people who are clearly and evidently 'fighting for existence' are the Palestinians.**

**So -- are you willing to 'lend a shoulder' to daily land-grabs and water-grabs and the inexorable squeezing and stifling of Palestinian lives and hopes? Are you willing to 'lend a shoulder' to illegal settlements and illegal military checkpoints, to detention without trial, torture in prison, and the innumerable daily cruelties, small and large, aimed at making Palestinian existence intolerable and driving people out?**

**If you don't support these actions by successive Israeli governments (documented in comprehensive detail by human rights organisations like Amnesty International), and if you don't want to appear to condone Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity (see, for example, the UN Goldstone report on the Gaza onslaught in 2008-9), then we believe you should want to cancel the Ramat Gan concert.**

**Your choice is simple: occupier vs occupied; ethnic cleanser vs ethnically cleansed; oppressor vs oppressed. You can't avoid it. Please follow the logic of your opposition to South African apartheid. 'Strong wind destroy our home' – it's happening to the Palestinians every day. Please lend a shoulder to them.**

**Yours sincerely,  
Professor Haim Bresheeth  
Mike Cushman  
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead**

**PS: We've just noticed that the liner notes of your recent album, 'So Beautiful or So What', were written by Elvis Costello. You probably know that Elvis Costello cancelled the concerts he was scheduled to give in Israel last year as 'a matter of instinct and conscience'. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) said Costello's decision was 'exceptionally brave and principled...a victory for the ethical responsibilities of international cultural figures'. When you cancel, you'll be in good company. Please don't go.**