

**AN OPEN LETTER TO AMERICAN SINGER RENEE FLEMING**

London, 5 July 2011

Dear Renee Fleming:

We understand you're singing a concert of 'duets and arias' in Jerusalem on July 28 with the Israel Philharmonic and their director, Zubin Mehta – a concert that will be simultaneously broadcast to 480 cinemas across the USA under the title 'Live from Jerusalem'.

We're writing to ask you urgently to reconsider your decision to do this. Even at this late stage, you have it within your power to act in sympathy with people who won't be able to attend your concert, because they are Palestinian. Two-thirds of the population was ethnically cleansed in 1947/8, and has never been allowed to return; millions more endure illegal occupation and siege by the Israeli army. When maestro Mehta raises his baton, none of these people will be in the audience – the Israeli authorities won't allow them into Jerusalem, let alone your concert at the Sultan's Pool. 'Live from Jerusalem' indeed – more like a wake – except the Palestinians are not yet defeated. 'This land promises wheat and stars', said the poet Mahmoud Darwish. 'We are its salt and its water. We are its wound, but a wound that fights.'

From what we read about your concert, we think it's using your fame and popularity in the USA to conduct propaganda for Israel. Do you really want to do this? Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations-sponsored Goldstone Commission, have all published a great deal of evidence to support charges of war crimes against the Israeli government and army who conducted the 2008-9 onslaught on Gaza, against a population that was completely trapped – could not escape, by land or sea. They were like turkeys in a barrel, and the Israeli army and airforce slaughtered them. You may think you are simply turning up in Jerusalem to share your glorious voice with music-lovers, but since Zubin Mehta himself describes the Israel Philharmonic as 'Israel's flagship', your performance will be spun as a declaration of support for Israel and the actions of its governments. Do you want to lend your stamp of approval to war crimes?

Renee Fleming, whether you want to be or not, you have become the operatic voice of the American people. You sang at the memorial for

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the 9/11 victims in October 2001; you sang at the inauguration of President Obama. You have an iconic importance that goes beyond the fact of your wonderful voice.

You can choose to use that weight for something brave – you can withdraw from the Jerusalem concert. You can say that you do not wish to appear to endorse Israel's cruel treatment of the Palestinians. If you do this, you will be in tune with a growing number of Americans who support an academic and cultural boycott of Israel as long as Israel denies Palestinian rights – they include [Adrienne Rich, Barbara Ehrenreich and Judith Butler](#).

Your countrywoman, Alice Walker, is even now on a ship called The Audacity of Hope, attempting to break the siege of Gaza. She says she is doing so because of 'the children of Palestine, who were ignored in our president's latest speech on Israel and Palestine, and whose impoverished, terrorised, segregated existence was mocked by the standing ovations recently given in the US Congress to the prime minister of Israel'. You can see her speak in this funny short film, [Gaza Island](#) (it also stars your colleague, Kiri te Kanawa).

In November last year, Cape Town Opera rejected appeals from all over the world, including from former archbishop Desmond Tutu, to cancel its tour of Israel. We thought you'd like to watch the [flash mob](#) put on outside its performance of 'Porgy and Bess' by Israeli supporters of the Palestinian call for boycott. 'Palestine', they sang, 'and the living ain't easy...'.

You are an adventurous artist, Renee Fleming, and we think a person of conscience. 'Boycott apartheid – it's time to tell Israel NO!', the flashmobbers sang. We hope you'll hear them. Please don't sing in Jerusalem.

Yours sincerely,  
Professor Haim Bresheeth  
Mike Cushman  
Dr Ghada Karmi  
Professor Adah Kay  
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead