

Artists have a role in resisting Apartheid

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Categories: Boycott culturel

Open Letter to Luca Hänni Switzerland's representative in Eurovision 2019 in Israel

Dear Luca Hänni

Your song has been chosen to represent our country in the 2019 Eurovision finals. We congratulate you for your success and we fully understand your pride. The BDS movement has profound respect for artists, particularly when ethical and political responsibility joins artistic pleasure. It is because of this responsibility that we are writing to you.

Going to sing in Israel nowadays is a decision that requires some thought. In 2018, the Israeli parliament took a decisive step by passing an [apartheid law](#) that relegates the non-Jewish population to second-class citizenship. The 2019 Eurovision is being organized by a State which has institutionalized apartheid. Artists who accept to participate *in this event give a stamp of approval to such a regime*.

Apartheid is a system of racial oppression, condemned by the United Nations, and considered to be a crime against humanity under international law. It is characterized by systematic discriminations aiming to oppress one population for the profit of another in the same territory. The construction of the Wall of Separation and the Israeli colonization of the West Bank; the progressive dismantling of the Palestinian territories; the locking up of 2 million Palestinians living in a ghetto, the Gaza Strip, the size of the canton of Geneva, the continual harassment of the Palestinian population living in Jerusalem; the Israeli army's humiliation and dehumanisation of the Palestinian population are all parts of a system that aims to erase Palestinians from their own land.

For 15 years now, Palestinian artists [have called upon artists from all over the world](#) to help them in their resistance by refusing to collaborate with institutions or participate in events that are instrumentalized by the oppressive regime. The BDS movement supports this call for boycott that comes from the heart of the Palestinian civil society. **Since 2004, artists invited to Israel have to decide whether they listen to the voices of Palestinian artists who call out to their conscience or become a puppet of the apartheid regime.**

In 2019, the Israeli government made no secret of its intention to instrumentalize Eurovision to embellish its image. The day after Netta's victory in Lisbon, Benjamin Netanyahu called her "[Israel's best ambassador](#)". This is called art-washing.

Dressed as an icon of diversity, Netta portrays herself as a symbol of a gay friendly country. This is called pink washing. Israeli propaganda's reclaiming of the LGBTIQ+ cause at Eurovision has been criticized

by Palestinian associations such as al Qaws for sexual and gender diversity in the Palestinian society, the Observatory Pink washing Israel and the feminist centre Aswat for sexual and gender freedom, [plus more than 90 LGBTIQ+ collectives](#) to date.

In fact, Netta's consecration was used as a festive backdrop to one of the worst massacres committed by the Israeli army. The day after Eurovision 2018, the Israeli army fired live ammunition on a crowd of Palestinian refugees gathered in front of the Gaza enclosures. 80 people were assassinated; 1 162 people were wounded by live ammunition, or sometimes by cluster bombs shot by Israeli snipers. The demonstrators, holding flags and makeshift slingshots as they had done every Friday since March 2018, were peacefully calling for the right to return to the homes from which the Israeli regime had chased their parents in 1948. The Council on Human Rights fact-finding mission, in a [report](#) published on February 28th 2019, has accused the Israeli regime of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity during the repression of Friday demonstrations in front of the separation fence.

This year, in the middle of May as well, Israeli television will organize the Eurovision Finals 2019. **Dignity and silence out of respect for those who died would be appropriate to commemorate this tragic event. Instead, there will be an orgy of sound, lights and special effects so that the Israeli government can normalize live its racist and apartheid regime.**

As we said in our [previous open letter](#) **those who choose to participate in this edition of Eurovision will play a role in the whitewashing of Israeli apartheid.** It is important to know this and to weigh the consequences. For our part, we cannot accept that music becomes an instrument of oppression serving a regime that has, in the past 70 years, acted with full impunity, often with the complicity of Western countries and who mocks United Nations resolutions.

Many artists in the 80's refused to compromise themselves with the South African regime. We remember the rallies of rappers and rockers, such as Kool DJ Herc, Miles Davis, Jimmy Cliff, Peter Gabriel, Herbie Hancock or Run.D.M.C. who refused to go to Sun City, the South African Las Vegas, to sing and who helped to bring about the end of apartheid.

There are today thousands of artists who are defying the oppressive Israeli regime. Just like in the campaign [No Song for Apartheid](#) (#NoSongForApartheid) in which more than one hundred artists wrote to the Swiss television asking it not to participate in Eurovision in Israel. Or artists' petitions circulating in several countries concerned by Eurovision. Or in Great Britain where Peter Gabriel, Ken Loach, Vivienne Westwood, Nick Seymour, Roger Waters and the group Wolf Alice have [called on the BBC](#) to boycott Eurovision 2019. Brian Eno, composer and producer has denounced Israel's highjacking of culture to turn attention away from its "[immoral and illegal](#)" behaviour.

Dear Luca Hänni, in our previous letter [addressed to the head of the SSR](#) we reminded them of Switzerland's complicity with the racist South African regime. Such a mistake should not take place twice. The time has come for each of us to take his/her place in resistance against Israeli apartheid.

Best regards,

BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) Switzerland