

Costello's Cancellation of Israel Concerts Sets Example

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal – On May 15, Elvis Costello announced via his website that he was cancelling two summer performances in Israel. He stated, “there are occasions when merely 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. I ... believe that the audience for the coming concerts would have contained many people who question the policies of their government on settlement and deplore conditions that visit intimidation, humiliation or much worse on Palestinian civilians in the name of national security. I am also keenly aware of the sensitivity of these themes in the wake of so many despicable acts of violence perpetrated in the name of liberation. ... I hope it is possible to understand that I am not taking this decision lightly or so I may stand beneath any banner ... It is a matter of instinct and conscience.”

The Vancouver-based singer’s decision made headlines around the world. Costello is the best-known artist yet to publicly refuse to perform in Israel due to its human rights violations. Other artists who have done so include singer Gil Scott-Heron, Indian writer Arundhati Roy, British novelist John Berger, US poet Adrienne Rich, British film director Ken Loach, and Canadian author and activist Naomi Klein.

Israel’s culture minister, Limor Livnat, responded to the news by saying that Costello “is not worthy” to perform in Israel. However, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) recognizes the importance of Costello’s decision and sees it as an example for others. “The Israeli government may not realize it yet, but its brutal assault on Gaza has left an indelible mark on the international psyche,” said CJPME President Thomas Woodley. In addition to ongoing rights violations due to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories, Israel’s brutal three-week assault on Gaza last year left over 1400 dead, most of them civilians, including over 400 women and children.

“We encourage other artists to boycott Israel until it ends its illegal military occupation of Palestinian territories and its cruel blockade of Gaza, which is preventing the victims of last year’s carnage from even rebuilding their lives and homes,” Woodley continued. “We hope that Diana Krall, Elton John and others with scheduled appearances in Israel will show the same sensitivity and courage that Costello has,” he added. Krall – Costello’s wife – still has a concert date in Israel in August. “When Israel ends its violations of international law, and respects the same standards other countries do, artists’ appearances there will no longer provoke controversy,” he concluded.

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Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.

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