

Artists with principle: Novelist Sally Rooney, actor Javier Bardem and author Jhumpa Lahiri protest Israeli mass murder in Gaza

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As we have noted before, there is *official* world public opinion, which largely supports the imperialist-backed slaughter in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon and slanders any opposition to the mass terror as “antisemitism”—and there is the “public opinion” of tens of millions around the world, whose sentiments don’t count in the eyes of the establishment and the media, who are horrified by the genocide.

In these tumultuous conditions, certain artists are demonstrating principle.

—Irish bestselling novelist **Sally Rooney** (born 1991) was in London September 25 at the Southbank Centre for the launch of her fourth novel, *Intermezzo*. In 2021, Rooney refused an offer from an Israeli publisher to translate *Beautiful World, Where Are You* into Hebrew, referring to her support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

On Wednesday, Rooney told her audience in London, to wholehearted applause, that in Gaza

countless heritage sites, museums, libraries, schools and mosques, as well as arts venues and cultural centres, much like this one, have been irretrievably destroyed. And that is not even to speak of over 40,000 people confirmed dead, each one a precious and irreplaceable life, each one loved and mourned. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are witnessing an unfolding genocide.

The violent death of any civilian in Israel, in Lebanon, in Palestine or anywhere is a terrible tragedy and an outrage. And the roots of this particular tragedy are in the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine and the apartheid system under which Palestinians are forced to live.

As we are lucky enough to be here tonight in London, in these beautiful surroundings, for what I

hope will be an evening of celebration and community, I want to make clear that we are also here in solidarity with the people of Palestine. And I want to urge you all, just as I also urge myself, not to turn away, not to give in to despair or fatigue, to keep protesting, to keep speaking out, to keep demanding an end to this horrifying war. It is the least that we can do. Thank you.

—On September 20, during a press conference at the San Sebastian Film Festival, where he picked up an award for career achievement, celebrated Spanish actor **Javier Bardem** condemned the Israeli government’s actions. Bardem came under attack in 2014 for “antisemitism,” along with his wife Penelope Cruz, for sharply criticizing Israeli actions in Gaza.

This week he commented,

I welcome [the award] with great joy but I am not in the mood for celebrations. ... What is happening in Gaza is totally unacceptable, it is terrible, it is dehumanizing. I believe that this Israeli government is the most radical government that Israel has ever had. Israel is committing crimes against humanity and international law.

Obviously, the atrocious, terrible, and reprehensible attacks on October 7 do not justify this massive punishment that the Palestinian population is suffering.

The impunity that the current Israeli government enjoys in its actions in Gaza and the West Bank has to change. I think that countries like the United States, Germany and England in particular have to rethink their unconditional support when we see crimes. Prohibiting the entry of food, water,

medicine and electricity, as UNICEF says, is a war against children, and continues this trauma for generations.

The actor asserted that

what I say or don't say will not change anything, but I think society is beginning to understand that the legitimate right to criticize any government has nothing to do with, in this case, the false accusation of anti-Semitism. ... We have the right and moral and ethical obligation to denounce that which we consider unjust.

Israel's extreme right-wing nationalist government is not at all representative of the Jewish community or Israeli society. It is our responsibility to be able to observe and denounce those situations that we consider unacceptable, and to ask the International Criminal Court, the international justice of the United Nations, to condemn and judge those responsible. In this case, Netanyahu. To give unconditional support [to Israel] is more than giving wings to the abuse of international law.

Bardem was given "a rousing round of applause from the journalists in the room," according to one report, following his statement.

—*Artnet* reported September 26 that

Pulitzer Prize-winning author **Jhumpa Lahiri** has turned down an award from the Noguchi Museum citing the Queens institution's new policy banning staff from wearing "political dress," including the keffiyeh, a traditional Middle Eastern head scarf that has come to symbolize solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

As the WSWs has reported, the Noguchi Museum terminated three workers in early September because they refused to remove, according to a suddenly imposed policy, the Palestinian scarves. They wore the latter in solidarity with the Palestinian people and in opposition to the genocide being committed by Israel and funded by the United States.

The firings, as we noted, came after weeks of turmoil, during which Noguchi museum employees and supporters protested the new policy with walkouts and demonstrations.

The museum, like many cultural institutions around the world, refused to budge on its ban of symbols of opposition to the genocide and continues to take funds from Zionist and pro-war sources.

The fired workers had courageously refused to remove the keffiyehs or submit to the museum's reactionary policy, clearly aimed at accommodating right-wing, pro-Zionist elements. As one of the workers explained to the WSWs, "When I wear a keffiyeh I am trying to draw attention to horrifying genocide in Palestine that is being conducted with our tax dollars."

Lahiri, the daughter of Indian parents, is a British-American novelist (born 1967), short story writer and essayist. Her first collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award.

The writer was scheduled to be honored alongside Korean artist Lee Ufan at the museum's October gala with the Isamu Noguchi Award.

"Jhumpa Lahiri has chosen to withdraw her acceptance of the 2024 Isamu Noguchi Award in response to our updated dress code policy," the Noguchi Museum said in a hypocritical statement on Wednesday. "We respect her perspective and understand that this policy may or may not align with everyone's views."

Artnet adds that Lahiri, who could not be reached for comment,

was one of the signatories in May of an open letter from scholars calling on university presidents to honor students' peaceful protests against Israel's war against Gaza following the October 7 Hamas attacks, which killed 1,200 people and took some 250 hostages. The letter spoke of the "unspeakable destruction" being carried out by Israel, with a death toll that has since topped 40,000.



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