

Other artists with principle: Indian writer Arundhati Roy and British actor Andrew Garfield speak out on behalf of the Palestinians

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The unspeakable crimes of the Israeli military and Netanyahu regime, only made possible by the full support and complicity of the imperialist governments in Washington, Paris, London and Berlin, continue to outrage and horrify thinking and feeling world public opinion.

The infamous acts occur on a daily basis. The mass murder in Gaza has become a war of extermination extending to the West Bank, Lebanon and beyond. The Israeli attack dog is anxious to launch a major assault on Iran. Negotiations with the Biden-Harris administration concerning a vast expansion of the murderous conflict, about which both parties agree, only involve secondary, tactical issues.

Official cultural life in the US and Europe solidly lines up with the annihilation of the Palestinian population. Nothing can be expected from museum and other institutional figures, whose careers increasingly depend on the whims of billionaires.

However, the effort to suppress the truth comes up against the realities of the slaughter accessible to tens of millions. Important voices continue to make themselves heard against “the utter ethical bankruptcy of our bourgeois society,” ruled by a “depraved barbarian horde incapable of culture,” in Rosa Luxemburg’s words.

Essayist, award-winning novelist and human rights activist Arundhati Roy took the opportunity recently to denounce the war on the Palestinians.

Roy delivered her scathing remarks October 10 at the British Library in London, on the occasion of being awarded the Pinter Prize 2024—honoring the memory of playwright Harold Pinter—by English PEN. The Indian author is best known for her 1997 novel, *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker Prize for Fiction. Roy has recently been targeted by the right-wing Modi government for her opposition to India’s brutal occupation of Kashmir. She has also been outspoken about the Zionist regime’s crimes in Gaza.

In her address, the writer referred bluntly to the “ongoing televised genocide in Gaza and now Lebanon in defence of a colonial occupation and an Apartheid state” carried out by the US and Israel. She continued,

The death toll so far is officially 42,000, a majority of them women and children. This does not include those who died screaming under the rubble of buildings, neighbourhoods, whole cities, and those whose bodies have not yet been recovered. A recent study by Oxfam says that more children have been killed by Israel in Gaza than in the equivalent period of any other war in the last twenty years.

In an important portion of her comment, she refused to offer a hypocritical denunciation of the uprising that occurred on October 7.

What can possibly justify what Israel is doing? The answer, according to Israel and its allies, as well as the Western media, is the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th last year. The killing of Israeli civilians and the taking of Israeli hostages. According to them, history only began a year ago.

So, this is the part in my speech where I am expected to equivocate to protect myself, my “neutrality,” my intellectual standing. This is the part where I am meant to lapse into moral equivalence and condemn Hamas, the other militant groups in Gaza and their ally Hezbollah, in Lebanon, for killing civilians and taking people hostage. And to condemn the people of Gaza who celebrated the Hamas attack. Once that’s done it all becomes easy, doesn’t it? Ah well. Everybody is terrible, what can one do? Let’s go shopping instead...

I refuse to play the condemnation game. Let me make myself clear. I do not tell oppressed people how to resist their oppression or who their allies should be.

Roy’s stance stands in sharp contrast with numerous intellectuals and artists, including various “left” Zionist figures in Israel itself. Prominent Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai, for example,

at the recent Venice film festival advanced precisely the position Roy describes, placing an equal sign between Palestinian “violence” and the state-organized mass murder carried out by the Netanyahu government.

In his most telling comments, Gitai suggested that “both the Palestinian militant group Hamas and the nationalist government of Benjamin Netanyahu had to be swept aside for peace to stand a chance.

“The two groups have to understand that the proposition of being under Hamas is not a good proposition. There will be no rights for women, no Christians of the Orient, no LGBT rights, nothing. The Iranians already went this way when they got behind Khomeini, and they’re stuck with it,” he said.

Gitai’s views no doubt are representative of a complacent, self-deluded layer of “left” artists and Israeli intellectuals, who justify their quiescence on the grounds that “Well, terrible things have been done by both sides,” “There’s good and bad here, good and bad there,” “Netanyahu is a criminal, but Sinwar is a criminal too,” and so forth. Everything evens out in the end, and therefore no action is required. Life can go on more or less as before in “vibrant,” “hipster” Tel Aviv.

In her October 10 speech, Roy made clear that she did not support the politics of Hamas, Hezbollah or the Iranian regime. She went on to argue, however, that there could not be any equivalence between the actions of Hamas

and what Israel and the United States are doing in Gaza, in the West Bank and now in Lebanon. The root of *all* the violence, including the violence of October 7th, is Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land and its subjugation of the Palestinian people. History did not begin on 7 October 2023.

I ask you, which of us sitting in this hall would willingly submit to the indignity that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have been subjected to for decades? What peaceful means have the Palestinian people not tried? What compromise have they not accepted—other than the one that requires them to crawl on their knees and eat dirt?

Israel is not fighting a war of self-defence. It is fighting a war of aggression. A war to occupy more territory, to strengthen its Apartheid apparatus and tighten its control on Palestinian people and the region.

Since October 7, 2023, apart from the tens of thousands of people it has killed, Israel has displaced the majority of Gaza’s population, many times over. It has bombed hospitals. It has deliberately targeted and killed doctors, aid workers and journalists. A whole population is being starved—their history is sought to be erased. All this is supported both morally and materially by the wealthiest, most powerful governments in the world. And their media. (Here I include my country, India, which supplies Israel with weapons, as well as thousands of workers.)

There is no daylight between these countries and Israel. In the last year alone, the US has spent 17.9 billion dollars in military aid to Israel. So, let us once and for all disperse

with the lie about the US being a mediator, a restraining influence, or as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (considered to be on the extreme Left of mainstream US politics) put it, “working tirelessly for a ceasefire.” A party to the genocide cannot be a mediator.

Not all the power and money, not all the weapons and propaganda on earth can any longer hide the wound that is Palestine. The wound through which the whole world, including Israel, bleeds.

Recent comments on Gaza by popular British actor Andrew Garfield have reached millions of people. Garfield was a guest on the *Happy Sad Confused* podcast, hosted by Josh Horowitz. The interview was conducted before a live audience at the 92nd Street Y in New York City.

Garfield, during an appearance to promote a new film, *We Live in Time*, was asked by Horowitz, rather foolishly, if he had any “personal needs.” “Is there anything we need to manifest for you tonight?,” the host inquired.

To his credit, the actor replied, “You know what, out of everyone in the world, I don’t need—I’m so happy. ... We should be putting our energy toward something that actually matters, you know? Yeah, maybe the lives of, I don’t know, Palestinians in Gaza right now. Maybe that’s where we should put our hearts and our energy.

“And anyone suffering, anyone oppressed — anyone that is suffering under the weight of the horrors of our world right now. Anyone who doesn’t have a choice in, you know, living lives of dignity. Yeah — that’s where our energy should be going right now.”

Garfield is best known, unfortunately, for his appearances in various *Spider-Man* films, although he has also had some serious roles in *Boy A*, *The Social Network*, *99 Homes*, for example, among others.

Garfield is Jewish on his father’s side and has described himself as a “Jewish artist.” His paternal grandparents moved to Britain from Poland, Russia and Romania. The family name was originally Garfinkel.

Last year, the actor was one of the many performers and others who signed the Artists4Ceasefire letter urging President Joe Biden to facilitate a cease-fire in Gaza. The signatories included Ben Affleck, Mahershala Ali, Mark Rylance, Bradley Cooper, Brian Cox, Cate Blanchett, Ewan McGregor, Florence Pugh, Jeremy Strong, Jessica Chastain, Richard Gere, Sandra Oh and Tom Hardy.



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