

Palestinian singer running to represent Iceland at Eurovision contest



Palestinian musician Bashar Murad was born in occupied East Jerusalem and continues to live there, but hopes to represent Iceland at the Eurovision song contest [File: Ammar Awad/Reuters]

Malmö, February 27 (RHC)-- Palestinian pop singer Bashar Murad is hoping to represent Iceland at the Eurovision Song Contest in May and bring “a Palestinian voice to the main stage”. Iceland is expected to pick its contestant on Saturday for the annual song competition, which is being held in the Swedish city of Malmö.

Murad is competing in the national final with a song co-written by Einar Stefansson of the Icelandic band Hatari, known for raising a banner showing Palestinian flags during the 2019 Eurovision Contest. While the competition bills itself as a non-political event and can disqualify those it considers to be in breach of the rule, the global political backdrop frequently weighs in on decisions.

In 2022, Russia was banned from participating in the contest after several countries called for its removal due to its invasion of Ukraine. In light of the war in Gaza, some artists have called on the competition organisers to also exclude Israel from the competition.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which organises the competition, said last week that they were scrutinising the lyrics of Israel’s song submission for possible references to the October 7 Hamas attack, which would go against the rules of the competition.

Israel has threatened to drop out of the competition if its song, Eden Golan’s, October Rain, is rejected.

But in Iceland’s domestic qualification, singers of any nationality can participate if they sing their song in the first semifinal in Icelandic.

Murad, who was born in and lives in occupied East Jerusalem, said it was difficult to learn the song in Icelandic, but he found some similarities to Arabic. His entry, Wild West, tells the story of challenging boundaries and chasing dreams against all odds.

“I wanted to illustrate how many obstacles as Palestinians we have to go through in order to be heard ... we’re excluded from every mainstream platform,” he said. “Everyone has theories about my participation. And everyone is politicising my existence when I’m really just a human who had a dream and applied for this competition fair and square.”

When asked if Murad wants Israel to participate in the competition, he said, “Of course, I don’t want my occupier to be there.” “But my main focus right now is to be able to bring, for the first time in history, a Palestinian voice to the main stage.”

Israel has won the competition four times and sees the contest as a barometer of its standing internationally.

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