

*Thousands of artists call for
Israel's exclusion from Venice
Biennale*

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Venice, February 27 (RHC)-- Thousands of artists, curators and museum directors have called for Israel to be excluded from this year's Venice Biennale art fair and accused the exhibition of "platforming a genocidal apartheid state." Israel has been facing mounting international criticism, including in the art world, over its military offensive in the besieged Gaza Strip that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians since October 7th.

The Art Not Genocide Alliance (ANGA) said the Biennale – a major international art exhibition – had two years ago banned anyone linked to the Russian government following the invasion of Ukraine, but not

taken action against Israel as it continues its war on Gaza.

“The Biennale has been silent about Israel’s atrocities against Palestinians. We are appalled by this double standard,” ANGA said in an online letter that had been signed by more than 12,500 people as of Tuesday.

It said the Biennale had also previously banned South Africa under its system of apartheid and white minority rule and pointed to the fact that leading human rights groups today deem Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian lands “a cruel system of apartheid and a crime against humanity.”

“Platforming art representing a state engaged in ongoing atrocities against Palestinians in Gaza is unacceptable,” the international collective of artists and cultural workers said. It called “any official representation of Israel on the international cultural stage” and “any work that officially represents the state of Israel” an “endorsement of its genocidal policies.”

Israel rejects any accusation that its actions amount to genocide. The International Court of Justice has found that it is “plausible” that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and ordered Israel to take all possible measures to prevent genocide.

Italy’s culture minister condemned the ANGA letter as “unacceptable” and “shameful”, saying it “threatens freedom of thought and creative expression.” “Israel does not only have the right to express its art, but has the duty to bear witness to its people at a moment like this, when it has been hit by surprise by merciless terrorists,” Gennaro Sangiuliano said in a statement.

Palestinian group Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli figures. Israel responded with a relentless bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza. More than 29,000 people have been killed in the Israeli assault, mostly women and children, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Sangiuliano said that the Biennale, set to begin on April 20, “will always be a space of freedom, of meetings and dialogue, and not a space of censorship and intolerance”.

ANGA said: “Art does not happen in a vacuum (let alone a “pocket”), and cannot transcend reality.”

“There is no free expression for the Palestinian poets, artists, and writers murdered, silenced, imprisoned, tortured, and prevented from travelling abroad or internally by Israel. There is no free expression in the Palestinian theatres and literary festivals shut down by Israel. There is no free expression in the museums, archives, publications, libraries, universities, schools, and homes of Gaza bombed to rubble by Israel. There is no free expression in the war crime of cultural genocide.”

Signatories of the appeal include Palestine Museum US Director Faisal Saleh, activist US photographer Nan Goldin and British visual artist Jesse Darling, who won last year’s Turner Prize. Dubbed the “Olympics of the art world,” the Biennale is one of the main events in the international arts calendar. This year’s edition, “Foreigners Everywhere,” is due to host pavilions from 90 countries between April 20th and November 24th.

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