**Open Letter to the Beacon Theatre: Do not present Idan Raichel**

March 19, 2015

Adalah-NY

https://adalahny.org/web-action/1276/open-letter-beacon-theatre-do-not-present-idan-raichel

**Tell the Beacon Theatre to stand against apartheid and oppression and cancel Idan Raichel’s concert**

**The Beacon Theatre in New York City should not co-sign the atrocities that the Israeli government is committing by hosting Israeli musician Idan Raichel’s concert on April 12. Idan Raichel calls himself a cultural Ambassador for Israel. He is an outspoken and uncritical supporter of the Israeli army, and he represents the Israeli government’s Brand Israel public relations campaign that aims to use the arts and culture to cover up Israel’s brutal repression of the Palestinian people.**

**Sign the letter below calling on the Beacon Theatre to act in the spirit of justice and human rights and cancel Raichel’s show. The letter was sent by Adalah-NY to the Beacon Theatre on March 5, 2015, signed by 15 groups. The Beacon Theatre did not respond in any way.**

Clinton Neils, VP and General Manager, Beacon Theatre

Dear Mr. Neils,

We are a group of organizations and individuals including cultural workers, activists and educators, who support the struggle for justice, human rights, equality and democracy in the Middle East. As such we are contacting you because we feel that presenting Idan Raichel at the Beacon Theatre (scheduled for April 12, 2015) is something you may wish to reconsider. Idan Raichel has [publicly endorsed torture](http://www.richardsilverstein.com/2014/01/06/idan-raichel-israeli-world-music-star-endorses-torture-rape-of-arab-prisoners/) and explicitly described his role as an artist in terms of uncritical support for the Israeli military and government. He wrote in the Jerusalem Post in June 2014 that “In creating this musical project we feel as if [we are cultural ambassadors for Israel](http://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/A-very-special-project-The-keyboardist-composer-and-producer-speaks-out-355234)**.**” He added, “When I look back over the past few years, I see an Israel I am happy with.” The "past few years" that Raichel speaks of here have included such wide human rights violations by Israel that only a month after this quote was published the [United Nations Human Rights Council began an investigation](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48330#.VLdeqFr43zI) into Israel's conduct in the territories it occupies.

In 2006, the Israeli government [launched a public relations initiative](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2006/Pages/International%252520Brand%252520Israel%252520seminar%252520to%252520be%252520launched%252520this%252520week%252520by%252520the%252520Foreign%252520Ministry%25252024-Oct-2006.aspx) called "Brand Israel," which [uses art and music](http://forward.com/articles/2070/israel-aims-to-improve-its-public-image/) to whitewash Israel’s human rights violations. According to Israel's [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html), sending Israeli artists and musicians abroad "show[s] Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war." In an October 2013[ABC interview](http://abc7news.com/archive/9284228/) with Idan Raichel conducted together with Israel’s Consul General to the Pacific North-West Andy David, David emphasized Raichel’s value to the Israeli government, saying. "I think Idan is maybe the best ambassador that Israel has through his music and his inclusiveness." This cynical use of art and music serves to obscure Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Israel’s overall history of grave human rights abuses, including the collective punishment of Palestinians through home demolitions, kidnappings, bombings and other means.

Although as a commercial venue you may consider yourself "apolitical," possibly based on a well-meant desire to separate the enjoyment of the arts from the political sphere, and may also just want to stay out of these difficult issues, because of the way Brand Israel was designed you are actually co- signing the atrocities that continue to be committed by the government he represents when you present a concert of his. Far from being apolitical or staying out of difficult issues, this concert is actually a strong political statement in favor of oppression and apartheid. No doubt, Idan Raichel is a popular musician who has persuaded many artists across cultures to collaborate with him. But he hardly represents the social values of equality, diversity and understanding that make cultural collaboration meaningful.

Although he appears to be a proponent of peace, Raichel actually has strong ties to the Israeli military. In his endorsement of the right-wing US organization[Thank Israeli Soldiers](http://www.thankisraelisoldiers.org/)**,**[he said](http://www.thankisraelisoldiers.org/?CategoryID=169&ArticleID=100) that supporting Israeli soldiers "is a fulfillment of the Jewish ideal.” Raichel performed for the army [before](https://www.facebook.com/yediothahronoth/photos/a.163280257033486.41864.137106982984147/895656393795865/?type=1)**,**[during,](http://www.vpmo.gov.il/Communication/DoverMessages/Pages/IdanReichel.aspx) and [after](https://www.facebook.com/yediothahronoth/photos/a.163280257033486.41864.137106982984147/895656393795865/?type=1) its August 2014 attack on Gaza,[which killed over 2100 Palestinians, including 500 children](http://blog.amnesty.org.nz/three-steps-to-achieve-a-lasting-truce-in-israel-and-gaza/)**.** Even more recently he began his US tour by attending a [gala fundraiser for Friends of IDF.](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4589328%2C00.html)

The Idan Raichel Project's 2012 tour of Africa was[initiated and produced by the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Israeli embassies in Africa](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4329210%2C00.html) to portray Israel as a welcoming, multicultural society. Avi Granot, head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Africa Division, said, “The goal in sending Raichel to Africa was to present Israeli culture at its best.” This effort is particularly disingenuous in light of [Israel’s treatment of Africans seeking political asylum](https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/23/israel-new-pressure-asylum-seekers-leave)**,** whom Israeli officials routinely refer to as “infiltrators.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [called](https://www.hrw.org/node/128682/section/4) African asylum seekers “a threat to the social fabric of society, our national security, our national identity . . . [and] our existence as a Jewish and democratic state.” Raichel’s performances in Africa, and with African artists like Vieux Farka Touré, are a calculated distraction from Israel’s policies and the attitudes of its leaders.

Presenting Idan Raichel runs counter to basic humanitarian values. It also ignores [Palestinian civil society's call](http://www.bdsmovement.net/call) for[Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)](http://bdsmovement.net/) to target [complicit Israeli institutions](http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1047) until Israel respects international law and ceases violating Palestinian rights. This boycott, modeled on the boycott of apartheid South Africa, will continue until Israel ends its military occupation of Palestinian land, grants equal rights to the Palestinians of Israel, and respects refugees’ right to return to their land.

We all look forward to the day when fans of world music can celebrate a post-Apartheid generation of socially conscious Palestinian and Israeli musicians, just as we have seen happen with [South African musicians](http://worldmusiccentral.org/2014/09/13/new-yorks-world-music-institute-reveals-2014-15-season/). We hope that you will reconsider your choice in light of the facts above and act in the spirit of justice and human rights now by canceling the Idan Raichel Project's planned April 12th concert at The Beacon Theatre.